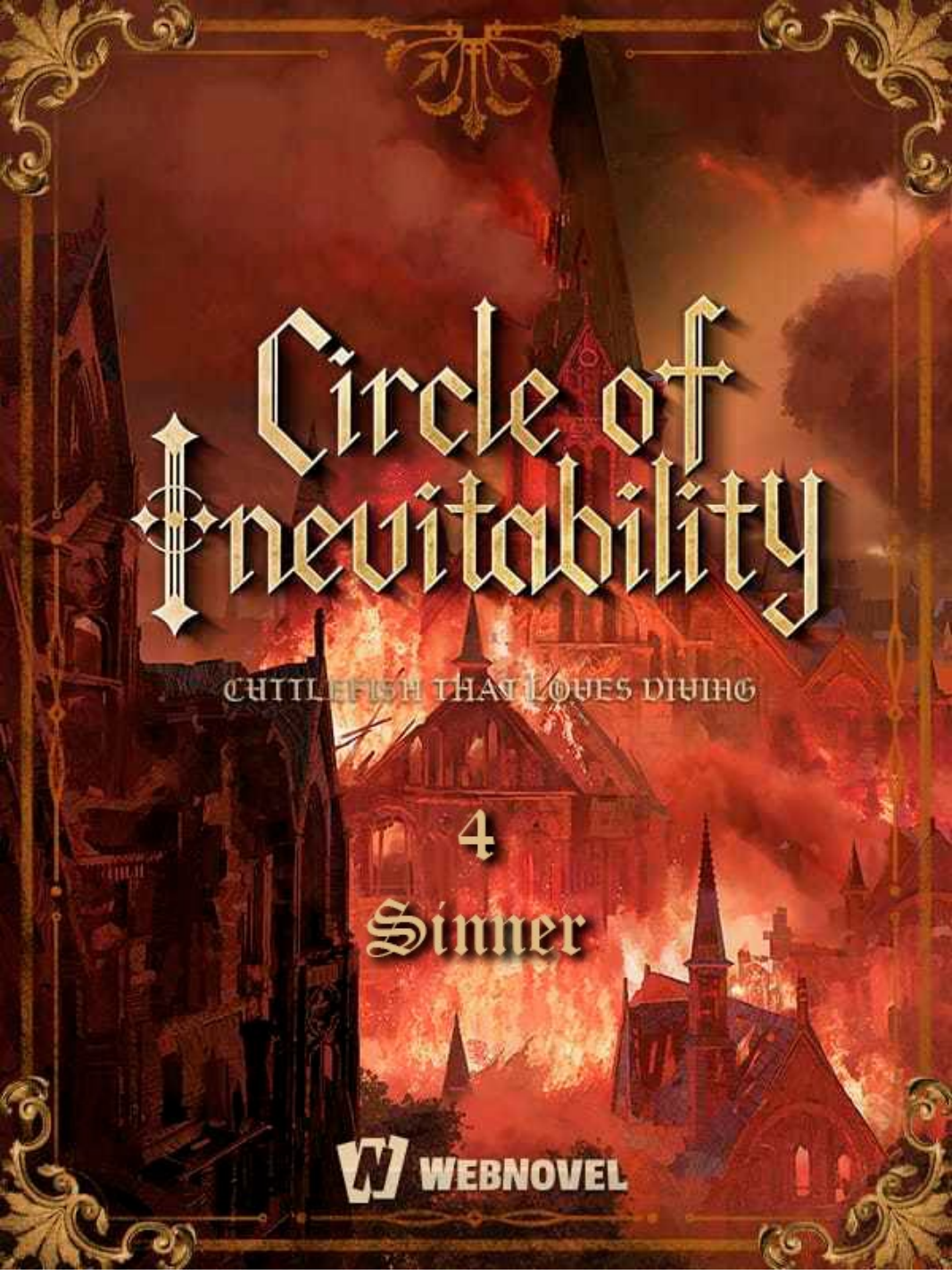
Circle of Inevitability
CUTTLEFISH THAT LOVES DIVING
4
Sinner
WEBNOVEL

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Chapter 495: Distribution

Oh, merciful Father, I implore your mercy for the transgressions I've made.

In Apartment 601, 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony fell silent as they stared at the gleaming full-body silver armor before them.

Before delving into the details, they had already sensed the power emanating from the Sealed Artifact. The brief yet potent Hurricane of Light it unleashed was a deadly force. Even Gardner Martin, a Sequence 5 Reaper, was willing to trade other mystical items for its might. However, upon scrutinizing the information provided, their initial enthusiasm waned, and they instinctively distanced themselves from the armor named Pride.

Within the Sealed Artifact information was a stark warning in red ink:

"The curse of betrayal originates from a deity's intense aversion and hatred before Their demise. Even Angels can't fully escape its grasp, only mitigating the negative effects to a certain extent. The sole solution is to shatter the armor and restore it to a pure Beyonder characteristic. However, this means losing its uniqueness. For instance, the ability to use Hurricane of Light again in just two minutes without delay. Moreover, those Beyonders who advance by consuming a potion derived from that Beyonder characteristic will endure reasonable but not-too-severe betrayal for an extended period."

Recalling Gardner Martin's tragic end, Franca, initially skeptical, now felt an unexplained fear. The betrayal curse seemed more formidable than she had imagined.

Lumian observed the hesitancy in Franca, Anthony, and Jenna, realizing none were eager to claim the particular spoils of war.

With a smile, he declared, "I'll go first."

Pointing at Gardner Martin's remains on the coffee table, he stated, "I choose Reaper."

The Beyonder characteristic had fused into a finger, creating an unusually sharp, bone-blade emitting an icy glint. The holder needed to be cautious to avoid accidental injury.

Immediately afterward, Lumian shifted his gaze to the charred bone flute originating from General Philip.

"I'll trade the Hypnotist Beyonder characteristics and the Decency brooch for this. You guys wouldn't be able to handle it anyway."

Per Madam Magician's intel, while the bone flute held significant power and uniqueness, it carried the risk of bringing misfortune in the form of injuries, death, and other grisly calamities. Only

Lumian possessed the resilience to withstand these negative effects and mitigate them without succumbing to excessive misfortune.

In truth, if General Philip's grudges before his demise hadn't been so potent, and if the curse of misfortune stemming from the Deceased pathway's boon hadn't been so exaggerated, Lumian might have struggled more to endure it. After all, enduring perpetual misfortune wasn't anyone's wish. Even if it wasn't lethal, it would still lead to considerable trouble.

Experiencing excessive bad luck was akin to tempting the fate intertwined with Termiboros, a fate deeply connected to Lumian. The potency of the bone flute wasn't sufficient to affect an Angel.

As per Madam Magician's detailed description, Lumian, naming the bone flute the Symphony of Hatred, discovered it possessed three abilities:

"With a simple blow, it emits a sharp, ear-piercing sound. This not only damages the Spirit Body, inducing dizziness, nausea, and convulsions in the target, but it can also directly impact Beyonders with weaker physiques—those equivalent to ordinary adults. They might suffer temporary blindness, paralysis, or internal organ damage.

"It appears that a symphony resonating from the depths of the river of fate inflicts a weakness on the enemy's mind. Those with unstable minds may experience symptoms akin to madness. Those with psychological issues might have latent problems triggered. There's even a chance that excessive desires could cause them to explode on the spot. Individuals with illnesses or old injuries will inevitably face severe consequences. Those less fortunate may find themselves extremely unlucky. Of course, the player needs some knowledge about musical instruments to play the bone flute effectively; otherwise, they'll only create noise, similar to the effect of a simple blow.

"While this bone flute is brittle and can't be used for blocking, wherever it stabs is equivalent to hitting a vital point. If it strikes a true vital point, the enemy will either be killed in a single blow or face the fate of social death for an extended period."

Franca observed as Lumian placed the colorless colloid with numerous bubbles and the Decency brooch, crafted into a Scotch Broom, on the coffee table. She nodded imperceptibly.

"That seems like a fair trade."

Observing the lack of objections from Anthony and Jenna, Lumian produced a deep-black cloth bag resembling a coin pouch. He carefully placed the Reaper Beyonder characteristic and the Symphony of Hatred bone flute inside.

This was one of Madam Magician's true rewards for him: Traveler's Bag.
Crafted personally by Magician, it was a Beyonder item devoid of characteristics. At first glance, it seemed to hold only up to two hundred coins, but it concealed another dimension within, equivalent to the entire Apartment 601. It could accommodate a vast array of items, including the Pride Armor.
Magician had also placed a specific seal inside the item. While within the bag, Beyonder characteristics didn't require regular relocation, and the negative effects of mystical items would significantly diminish.
The Traveler's Bag needed resealing and reinforcement every six months; otherwise, it would lose its mystical abilities and become ordinary. In such circumstances, if the items inside weren't retrieved promptly, they would be lost to the spirit world and nearly impossible to recover.
Similarly, Franca received a Traveler's Bag as her reward.
After claiming his share, Lumian turned his attention to Anthony Reid, indicating for the Psychiatrist to make his selection.
Anthony smiled wryly. "I contributed the least. I'll take this Hypnotist main ingredient. I feel that my psychological problems have been alleviated. I can contemplate advancing."
In his interactions with Lumian, Franca, and the others, he often heard words and sentences infused with mystic knowledge. Though he refrained from direct inquiries, over time, he vaguely grasped various patterns and the essence of things he wouldn't have considered before. It was as if a new world had unfolded before him.
"No problem," Franca replied, not insisting on Anthony choosing another item. She turned to Jenna and said, "I want the mirror fragment left behind by the fake Martin."
Madam Magician referred to this item as the "Mirror World Fragment." It served as a crucial clue for Franca's subsequent investigation into the state of the Primordial Demoness, and it possessed a unique quality: Using it to reflect a target allowed the user to create a corresponding "Mirror Person." However, they couldn't replicate entities with godhood, and the mirroring effect could only be maintained for a maximum of five minutes.
The fragment produced two types of Mirror People. The first was a shallow mirror image, replicable in ten seconds. The second was a deep conversion that took a minute to complete. The former retained the original body's state, as long as the body hadn't undergone a gender change—similar to those Franca and Lumian had encountered before. However, these Mirror People were

relatively weak, equivalent to the original body at a certain past stage and lacked abilities like Mirror Substitution. The latter was a nearly perfect replica, akin to the ones recently encountered, possessing special traits.

Of course, for a Demoness of Pleasure, this wasn't practical. If she could already capture the other party's figure with a mirror, why not directly cast a curse instead of creating a Mirror Person?

Lumian interjected, "You can take another one, Franca. No need to be modest. Your contributions in these battles are second only to mine."

"What do you mean second only to you?" Franca scoffed, pushing the Decency brooch in her direction.

The only remaining spoils of war were the small dark-painted wooden box, each side adorned with a membrane curtain, and the Pride Armor. Jenna swiftly made her choice and selected the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.

According to Lumian, her lucky gold coin no longer carried any additional luck. Its usefulness was now limited to specific situations. Recognizing this, she didn't believe she could resist the betrayal curse of the Pride Armor. Jenna understood the importance of not being overly prideful and blindly relying on luck, taking Gardner Martin's fate as a sobering lesson.

The usage of Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction involved grasping valuable items with one's hand, inserting them into the dark wooden box through the side "curtain," handing it to the outstretched palm-like object, and stating one's requirements. This process simplified complex matters and eased difficult transactions.

However, one needed to have a clear, achievable target—no vague requests were allowed. For example, directly stating a desire for a specific Beyonder characteristic or mystical item was useless. Users had to find the corresponding Beyonder characteristic or mystical item, fail to reach a deal, and then make their request. This approach involved changing the seller's mind, with a high chance of securing a steep discount.

The "Under-the-table Transaction" had various applications, even allowing two individuals with deep grudges to reconcile by shaking hands inside the box—though the individual shaking hands wasn't actually the other party.

Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction was an active remnant of boon powers, and without Beyonder characteristics, it could only be used nine more times. The downside was that each use increased the likelihood of encountering evil creatures like Demons in future transactions.

As Jenna stowed away the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, Franca smiled and said,
"I wish to use the Decency brooch to exchange for the black Primordial Demoness figurine, or would you prefer to zero your debt as an exchange?"
Following Madam Judgment's suggestion, Franca intended to use this unique figurine to gauge the Demoness Sect's reaction and potentially exchange it for their rewards.
"T-this is everyone's spoils of war," Jenna responded in confusion.
Franca grinned and explained, "No, it's yours. Back then, only you with the lucky gold coin could hold it, so it's rightfully yours. To put it simply, this is a gain from 'luck.'"
Jenna glanced at Lumian and Anthony, finding their nods of agreement. She muttered, "Dammit, you're making me feel embarrassed... I want the Decency brooch. Only by personally paying off a debt does it become meaningful."
As she spoke, Jenna handed the black Primordial Demoness figurine to Franca and stowed away the Decency brooch, carved into a Scotch Broom.
Finally, the group directed their attention to the silver-white Pride Armor, and a contemplative silence ensued once again.
After a lengthy pause, Franca exclaimed, "Ciel, keep it. Treat it as a communal item that anyone can use. Only the both of us can carry it conveniently now. Besides, you're about to head to Port Santa in Feynapotter's Gaia Province. You can't borrow my Mirror Substitution anymore. This armor will be very useful in critical moments."
Lumian had already made the decision to investigate the sea prayer ritual in Port Santa, Feynapotter Kingdom's Gaia Province, and search for traces of the April Fool's key members—Bard and Ultraman.

Chapter 496: Sin

Lumian commented nonchalantly towards Franca's suggestion, "That works too. In the future, if anyone wants to use this armor, I'll 'teleport' it to you. What's this called? It's called Ciel Postal Service. It'll be delivered immediately!"

After joking, he approached the Pride Armor standing beside the coffee table and began stuffing its silver-white glove into the opening of the Traveler's Bag.

With this motion, the towering full-body armor shrank into the small black cloth bag.

As long as one part of an item could enter a Traveler's Bag, it could pass through the opening regardless of its size, as long as it didn't exceed the space within. Typically, flesh and blood infused with vitality couldn't be stored in a Traveler's Bag.

Considering these factors, Lumian's initial thought upon obtaining the Beyonder item and its "explanation manual" was that it could be used to conceal a corpse.

"How magical..." Jenna watched the scene unfold with envy.

Despite attending numerous mysticism gatherings, she had never encountered such an item. The closest thing she knew was the world inside a painting.

Lumian concealed his Traveler's Bag beneath his clothes, a smile playing on his lips. Addressing Anthony and Jenna, he remarked, "After this incident, you ought to know Franca and I are backed by a secret organization. It's not the Iron and Blood Cross Order or the Demoness Sect. So, what do you say? Interested in joining? If not, I'll need you to sign a confidentiality agreement or swear a binding oath of secrecy."

Having heard Lumian and Franca discuss the secret organization and knowing that they genuinely believed in Mr. Fool, Jenna was familiar with the tarot card code name. Having received The Fool's response, her decision was swift.

"I'm in."

Anthony Reid pondered in silence for a moment before inquiring, "Does your organization follow some hidden entity?"

"It's an orthodox god," Lumian responded, addressing Anthony's unspoken concerns. "If you doubt me, I can show you the cathedral."

Observing Lumian's expression, Anthony confirmed the sincerity.

The Psychiatrist let out a bitter laugh and admitted, "Then I don't have an issue. My past experiences and this incident have taught me that I'm still too feeble to prevent such a catastrophe. Even if it stands right beside me, I can only watch as myself and those

around me plummet into the abyss."
For Anthony, joining a secret organization seemed like a pragmatic choice to strengthen himself—especially one that followed an orthodox god.
As a believer of the God of Steam and Machinery, Anthony had carefully considered it. He realized that the Church's scriptures lacked any mention of animosity between orthodox gods, unlike the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, which perpetually preached hatred towards the Lord of Storms and the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.
In other words, his faith wouldn't hinder Anthony from joining such a secret organization.
Without waiting for Lumian and Franca's response, Anthony grinned self-deprecatingly and admitted, "I originally planned to head back to the West Midseashire Coast, live in the countryside, but now I'm worried I can't escape the looming catastrophe. Just like those in the market district, who'd willingly dance on the edge of life and death amidst repeated abnormalities? Yet, their wills and desires are futile.
"From what I've seen, catastrophes are becoming more frequent."
Lumian mocked his companion.
"You've turned into a nag after your mental illness got sorted."
He continued, "We'll hash out the details once you confirm your Major Arcana card and get your mission assignment."
Jenna pursed her lips, a dark expression crossing her face.
"I actually kinda like living in the market district..."
It seemed like she needed to leave this place.
A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.
"This is, in fact, protection for the market district. Hunters and Demonesses always bring catastrophe."
Always bring catastrophe, even if they don't do anything? Jenna's eyes narrowed as she sank into deep thought.
"F*ck off! You're the only one like this!" Franca cursed, a mix of irritation and amusement.
In the past few months, most catastrophes in the market district had orbited around Ciel. *What did it have to do with Jenna and me?*
Wouldn't that prove that 007 was right?
After discussing other matters, Lumian and Franca stepped out of 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches into the morning sun. One headed for Psychic's headquarters on Rue Scheer in Avenue du Boulevard, while the other made her way to Trocadéro.
Lumian opted for a four-wheeled, two-seater rental carriage instead of the usual public carriage.
Outside the carriage window, street vendors hawked Whiskey

Sour, meatloaf, freshwater fish, onion bread, spicy sauce, soybean paste, and various other items. Passersby either paused to make a purchase or briskly moved on. Some were clad as clerks, others in an array of differently colored workers' uniforms.
After the riot of the previous night and the apocalyptic downpour, this place was once again alive with activity.
For Lumian, it was reminiscent of the market district of the past, but now, he was a wanted criminal again—in his identity as Ciel Dubois, a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and a leader of the Savoie Mob.
Salle de Bal Brise and the other establishments had undoubtedly been seized by the police headquarters. The Iron and Blood Cross Order's grip on the market district had almost been eradicated.
Lumian found it regrettable as it meant losing a stable source of income.
However, after taking Ludwig in the previous night and informing Madam Magician about the information, he intentionally returned to Salle de Bal Brise before the chaos settled. He secured 30,000 verl d'or from the safe, bringing his total to 75,000 verl d'or and 1,000 gold.
Lumian's mind wandered as he observed the passersby and listened to the vendors' pitches.
After "reporting" the previous night's matters to Mr. K and obtaining the Aurora Order Oracle's approval, he planned to leave Trier for the Feynapotter Kingdom.
Before embarking on his journey, he had three priorities:
Firstly, he needed to locate Lugano Toscano, who had lost his job again, and inquire if he was willing to accompany him to the Feynapotter Kingdom's Port Santa. This Sequence 8 Doctor, often journeying to the Feynapotter Kingdom, was fluent in highlander. Lumian, knowing only Intisian and ancient Feysac, risked communication challenges without him—having to resort to body language.
Secondly, he awaited Jenna and Anthony's Major Arcana card missions to see if they could collaborate and assist each other.
Thirdly, he planned to use the messenger-related spirit world creature information that came with the Reaper formula from Madam Magician to attempt gaining a messenger. This would make future communication with Franca and others more convenient. Additionally, he had to perform a ritual to acquire one or two more contractual abilities.
...
On Avenue du Boulevard, at 19 Rue Scheer, beneath the luxurious beige house, Lumian met Mr. K once again in the basement.

The Oracle, his face concealed in hooded shadows, occupied a red armchair, his profound gaze fixed on Lumian.
"Last night, I entered Fourth Epoch's Trier," Lumian got straight to the point, hoping to capture Mr. K's attention.
Mr. K's hooded head nodded. "I know. Tell me the whole story."
You know? Lumian was surprised. He recounted capturing Bouvard Pont-Péro during his revenge, and the subsequent events of how he, Franca, and company defeated Mirror Gardner, using the special mirror world to escape Fourth Epoch Trier.
Throughout the entire narrative, he shared only his experiences, avoiding any mention of Jenna and the others' encounters or his speculations. For instance, he omitted details like the fortunate gold coin or Jenna's prayer to Mr. Fool, stating only that he had inexplicably entered the world in the painting.
Similarly, he left out many specifics.
Mr. K listened attentively without interrupting Lumian's account.
After Lumian mentioned the elimination of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's market division and his exposed identity, Mr. K stood up and spoke in a hoarse voice, "No problem. Feel free to seek my assistance at any time."
Without awaiting Lumian's response, the Aurora Order Oracle turned around, knelt, and prostrated himself on the ground.
Mr. K's face pressed tightly against the floor tiles as he muttered to himself, his thoughts incomprehensible.
Lumian waited in silence, refraining from interrupting Mr. K. The shadows around him deepened, as if unseen eyes were fixed on him, sending shivers down his spine.
Yet, he remained unfazed. It seemed normal for individuals from the Aurora Order to suddenly exhibit erratic behavior.
After an indeterminate period, Mr. K coughed violently, and blood spurted from the ground.
He looked up and spoke in a deep, frenzied voice, "Oh, merciful Father, I implore your mercy for my transgressions."
After repeating this three times, Mr. K's face pressed against the ground again, emitting sounds of chewing and devouring.
After performing these peculiar actions, he stood up and tapped four times—top, down, left, right—on his chest.
"What happened? Why the repentance?" Lumian asked curiously.
Mr. K rasped, "Our Aurora Order failed to react in time to last night's catastrophe. Failing to cooperate with you in destroying the ritual was my dereliction of duty."
"It's not your responsibility," Lumian replied, his lips twitching.
The Tarot Club's actions had primarily propelled the Hostel's plan forward. It was already commendable for the Aurora Order to

swiftly discern what had occurred. There was no need for Mr. K to repent and shoulder the blame for the lapse.
Mr. K shook his head. "No matter the reason, failure to act is a sin."
Do you have to be so responsible... You're just a secret organization, not fanatical believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun... Lumian muttered silently.
As if sensing Lumian's thoughts, Mr. K spread his arms wide and spoke with abnormal fanaticism, "Because our Aurora Order is born to bear all sin."
I think you're being too extreme... Lumian struggled to control his expression.

Chapter 497: The Fragment's Origins

Mr. K didn't impose any specific requests for Lumian's journey to Feynapotter. He merely reiterated that Lumian could utilize the finger anytime he faced challenges. As long as he wasn't in a unique environment, the Aurora Order Oracle could sense it through the blood connection and offer prompt assistance.

Sensing it over quite a long distance. As expected of being a part of your body... I wonder if Demonesses can complete a curse after obtaining this finger... Lumian bade farewell to Mr. K, his thoughts drifting, and exited the opulent beige house at 19 Rue Scheer.

...

In Trocadéro Town, at the entrance of the manor surrounded by grapevines, Franca caught sight of Browns Sauron, her long orange-red hair cascading down like a waterfall.

The Demoness smirked mockingly and said, "I heard your lover is dead?"

"Did you just drink the Provoker potion?" Franca retorted without backing down. "Could it be that members of the Sauron family carry a Provoker trait from birth?"

Without waiting for Browns's response, Franca walked past her, chuckling.

"Yes, Gardner Martin is indeed dead. I killed him myself."

Browns's pupils dilated as she turned her head in surprise to gaze upon Franca's side profile. She saw that the new Demoness had a faint smile on her face, but her eyes were deep and dark—a mix of pleasure and pain, solemn and ruthless.

Franca considered adding, "I was even present to hear your ancestor's scream while being killed," but that would expose her grasp of extensive secret intel and mysticism knowledge that she ought not to have at her level. It would arouse the Demoness Sect's suspicion, so she abandoned the idea. As she advanced, she smiled and said, "Then, I found the item Gardner Martin and his collaborators smuggled into Trier through the catacombs."

"You've found it. What is it?" Browns hadn't expected Franca to complete this mission, a mix of surprise and a tinge of jealousy crossing her features.

Franca didn't hide anything. This was her purpose in coming to Demoness of Black Clarice.

She produced the pitch-black figurine with its hair facing the opposite direction of the orthodox version and waved it in front of Browns.

Browns's expression froze, as if she had seen something terrifying.

"W-why? How is it appearing here...?" The Demoness of Pleasure's

voice trailed off, her tone filled with unconcealable shock.
Franca seized the opportunity to ask, "You know what it is?"
Browns snapped out of her daze, her eyes flickering as she said, "My teacher will tell you."
Franca didn't press further and changed the subject with a smile. "Why does your teacher call herself the Demoness of Black? Wouldn't any ordinary person consider a Demoness a derogatory term?"
"Everyone has different aesthetic standards. Some like to call themselves Saintesses, while others find Demonesses cool. They have a unique and unorthodox flair." Browns appeared more inclined to the latter.
Franca pondered seriously, Men retain their youthful spirit even in death. *Is there such excessive self-awareness?* Even if they were once men... She realized that if someone called her a Demoness of XX, she would probably feel a strange sense of smugness despite her embarrassment. However, if it were Saintess, she would definitely have goosebumps—her toes cringing so bad that they could dig a hole and bury herself in it.
Before long, Franca encountered the Demoness of Black at the circular pavilion amidst the grapevines and numerous vines.
Clarice's dark gray eyes, tinged with melancholy, swept across Franca's face and the black Primordial Demoness figurine in her hand.
Her gaze lingered on the latter for a few seconds before she said, "Did you obtain this from the Iron and Blood Cross Order?"
"Yes, I did." Franca took the initiative to recount the previous night's encounter.
She recounted from the moment she failed to tail the Carbonari member until how she and Anthony Reid mysteriously entered the sealed Fourth Epoch Trier under the influence of the Primordial Demoness figurine and the ancient silver mirror despite clearly being in Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.
She didn't hide the existence of the ancient silver mirror anymore. She only said that she had accidentally obtained it underground a few months ago. This time, it had some effect but disappeared without a trace after they sank underground.
Everything she said was the truth—every word the truth.
Demoness of Black Clarice interrupted Franca's account and asked thoughtfully, "Did you run into Gardner Martin as soon as you entered?"
Although she hadn't seen it with her own eyes, she seemed to foresee the development.
"Yes, there was also that Carbonari member. He's General Philip,

who faked his death. This strange figurine was found on him," Franca replied truthfully. "At that time, Anthony and I nearly died at Gardner and Philip's hands. Fortunately, Ciel and Jenna inexplicably entered and were hidden nearby."
She briefly recounted the battle and deliberately redirected Jenna's ability towards Vampires.
After listening for a while, the Demoness of Black raised her right hand and gently stroked her face.
"You said that there was an area in the wilderness with chaotic weather in the distance, and there was a giant figure surrounded by hurricanes and thick fog?"
"Yes, we also heard his roar and nearly lost control. Fortunately, we entered the gray fog-shrouded city in time. The commotion outside became very muffled." Franca hadn't expected the Demoness of Black to be so concerned about the giant.
Clarice listened quietly and let out a soft sigh. She felt a mix of sorrow, disappointment, and indescribable relief, making her feel exceptionally pitiful.
Browns looked at her teacher with a puzzled expression, as if she didn't understand why the Demoness of Black had such a reaction.
Franca was puzzled at first, but then her heart skipped a beat.
Browns belongs to the Sauron family. *Could it be the same for the Demoness of Black?*
Could they be a branch of the Sauron family that had pledged allegiance to the Demoness Sect?
However, the Demoness of Black's hair and eyes don't resemble those of a genuine Sauron family member...
If they are all from the Sauron family, could the Demoness of Black be Browns's relative, or even her father or mother, leading to Browns's current state?
Had the Demoness of Black heard about Vermonda Sauron's current situation and understood the Iron and Blood Cross Order's scheme? *Is that why she's so emotional?*
As these thoughts raced through Franca's mind, she continued to recount the battle between the four of them and Mirror Gardner. Finally, she took out the pitch-black Mirror World Fragment.
"Your Excellency Demoness of Black, what's this? And what's this figurine?"
Demoness of Black Clarice gazed at the Mirror World Fragment and the black Primordial Demoness figurine and said, "In conventional mysticism, the mirror world isn't a true world. It's an amalgamation of the concept of doors, connected to mirrors and alternate spaces. However, many members of our Demoness Sect are aware that in certain special places, for specific reasons, there

are a few mirror worlds with monsters. You encountered one of them, and this is a fragment of that world..."
She briefly recounted what Franca already knew about the Mirror World Fragment. Finally, she said, "This should have been handed over to me for a reward, but according to your description, many underground Mirror People have already infiltrated Trier. This fragment can help you track them, find them, and eliminate them. You can keep it for a while until the mission is completed.
"Hmm, this is your next mission. Clean up Trier's Mirror People and gather any similar fragments that might be on them."
The origins and effects are the same as what Madam Magician said. From the looks of it, Clarice wasn't lying to me... Sigh, my next mission is in Trier. I can't follow Ciel to Feynapotter to search for Bard and company... At critical moments, I can get him to 'teleport' me there to provide help... Franca sighed inwardly and said, "Yes, Your Excellency Demoness of Black."
The Demoness of Black continued, "This figurine originates from one of the special mirror worlds.
"We believe in the Primordial One in reality. The Mirror People believe in the mirrored Primordial One, but it's actually just a projection of the Primordial One in the mirror."
Just as I suspected... The Primordial Demoness's projection in the mirror underwent an abnormality and gained self-awareness, causing Her condition to worsen? Or is Clarice not telling the entire truth? Under the Demoness of Black's instructions, Franca handed over the special figurine.
Clarice nodded slightly and said, "You completed the Iron and Blood Cross Order mission better than I expected by retrieving this special figurine. What reward do you want?"
Franca didn't hesitate and answered, "The potion formula for Affliction, or perhaps a mystical item that allows me to traverse the spirit world."
The Demoness of Black revealed an inconspicuous smile.
"This time, I'll give you the potion formula for Affliction. Once you complete your next mission, you can choose a mystical item with the Spirit World Traversal ability."
Does that mean I can't exchange my contributions for teleportation-type items this time, but they surpass the value of the Demoness of Affliction formula? I can save a portion and exchange them together when I make other contributions? Franca pondered for a moment and said, "Okay."
Demoness of Black Clarice raised her right hand and swiped at the void.
Franca immediately noticed numerous dark Hermes words

outlined on the watery surface at the edge of the circular pavilion.
"Affliction potion formula:
"Sequence: 5;
"Main ingredient: Flower-Faced Bat's head, Two-Tailed Black Snake's gallbladder;
"Supplementary ingredients: 30 milliliters of Flower-Faced Bat blood, 50 milliliters of a seriously ill human's blood, tail tip of the Two-Tailed Black Snake, 10 drops of Enfinitas Eucalyptus essential oil;
"Ritual: Without substitutes, be burned at the stake for fifteen minutes and survive without going mad."
Hiss... Just reading the description hurts... Franca couldn't help but shrink back.
After memorizing the potion formula, she left the manor with Browns.
Demoness of Black Clarice watched her silently as she retrieved an item from a hidden pocket in her black court dress.
It was a pitch-black mirror fragment.
It bore a striking resemblance to Franca's Mirror World Fragment, albeit with an irregular fracture at the edge.

Chapter 498: Suspicious Attitude

Lugano Toscano, a burly man with brown hair, brown eyes, and sharp features, donned a budget-friendly black formal suit. He lowered his head as he navigated through the lively crowd, his top hat shading his face.

After a series of turns, the Beyonder, now a Sequence 8 Doctor, entered Rue des Pavés beside Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. He ascended a creaking wooden staircase to the top floor of an ancient house.

Upon waking that day, before having breakfast, his companion informed him of being wanted—due to his role as Ciel Dubois's trusted subordinate managing a dance hall.

Despite Lugano's confusion about the Savoie Mob's motives and his certainty of non-involvement, as a wild Beyonder, merely existing rendered him guilty. Reluctant to seek clarification from the Purifiers and Machinery Hivemind, he packed his bags and moved to the safe house without notifying his companions. His plan was to observe for a few more days before deciding on his next move.

During the factories' lunch break, making the market district bustling, Lugano descended and surveyed the area. True to his expectations, he discovered he was indeed wanted, with a bounty of 2,000 verl d'or.

Considering his perceived lack of importance, Lugano hoped to fade from the official Beyonders' attention in due time.

Entering the room, not much larger than an attic, Lugano used a brass key to open the dark-brown wooden door.

Amidst the creaks, a figure caught the Doctor's eye.

Seated at a simple wooden table, Ciel Dubois displayed golden-black hair, a silver earring, a white shirt, a dark jacket, grayish-blue pants, and leather shoes.

How did he find this place? Besides me and the landlord residing in another quartier, no one knows about this safe house! Officially put to use for the first time today! Lugano's pupils dilated, as if he wanted to scrutinize the figure in the dim room.

At some point, the open curtains had been drawn.

Lumian grinned at Lugano and remarked, "Why? Am I not welcomed?"

Lugano instinctively forced a smile, replying, "It's an honor to have you here. I just didn't expect you to know about this doghouse of mine."

He spoke with humility but also subtly hinted at Lumian: I haven't forgotten that I'm your dog!

As Lugano spoke, he entered the room, closing the wooden door

behind him.
The space darkened, and a snap echoed.
The candles on the simple wooden table suddenly ignited, casting a yellowish flame.
Lumian lowered his raised right palm and nodded slightly, asking, "Any questions?"
Lugano didn't delve into the crimes of the Savoie Mob's brass that had made him a wanted man. Instead, his concern was elsewhere.
"Monsieur Ciel, how did you know about this safe house of mine?"
Lumian chuckled.
"I can find anything if I put my mind to it."
Wh— Lugano's eyes narrowed, sensing the formidable confidence in the other party.
Ciel's actions also validated his words.
Of course, Lumian wouldn't tell Lugano that he had followed him multiple times, determining the locations of his three safe houses.
As a Hunter, Lumian often roamed the market district during his free time, honing his tracking skills. He was well-acquainted with the area.
While he randomly chose targets for ordinary passersby and residents, Lugano Toscano, a Beyonder seeking to join his ranks, was a crucial subject of investigation to prevent betrayal. Lumian kept a close eye on him to avoid being blindsided by any potential treachery.
Without waiting for Lugano to delve into further inquiries, Lumian got straight to the point.
"I need your help with something."
"It's my honor." Lugano didn't seek details and acted as if he was unquestionably on board.
Isn't this too toady? I'm now a wanted criminal. Without Salle de Bal Brise and other businesses, it's impossible for me to provide any more resources... Lumian stroked his chin with his right hand.
"I need to make a trip to the Feynapotter Kingdom. I wish for you to be my translator."
Lugano promptly responded, "No problem."
Is that so? But I have a problem... Lumian, a Conspirer, grew suspicious of Lugano's unquestioning loyalty, given the lack of inquiry or discussion about returns. He instantly became highly focused.
Could it be that this fellow, like Ludwig, has been "sent" by some faction to interact with me? Lumian raised his eyebrows and smiled.
"I thought you'd refuse. After all, you've already become a Doctor.

Even without taking any risks, you can lead a very good life."
Doctors could use superpowers to treat illnesses and injuries, easily sustaining themselves in any country or city.
Lugano said sheepishly, "I'm also wanted. I'm planning to find a place to hide before returning to Trier. Besides, I believe you'll reward me handsomely.
"Although Doctors can treat illnesses, we can't use Beyonder powers openly. That would attract the attention of official Beyonders unless we only dabble in the black market. The best choice is to forge a doctor's license and open a clinic. Add on Beyonder powers while providing regular treatment. However, it will require a large sum of starting funds and sufficient medical knowledge. I already have the latter. As for the former, I've just exchanged all my savings for the main and supplementary ingredients for the Doctor potion."
As he spoke, Lugano's smile ingratiated.
"Once I become a renowned doctor in Trier, I'll earn at least 200,000 verl d'or annually. That way, I won't have to adventure anymore. Even if I don't want to become too famous and attract the attention of official Beyonders, it'll be easy for me to earn 40,000 to 50,000 verl d'or a year."
You're quite familiar with Trier's doctor incomes... Lumian gazed at Lugano's face, his doubts dissipating but still lingering.
He quickly made up his mind and stood up slowly.
"Excellent. Wait three days for me here. I'll come to you after I'm done with other matters. When the time comes, I'll pay you a 5,000 verl d'or advance. When I don't need your translation services, I'll give you another 5,000 verl d'or. If there's a battle midway, you can divide the spoils of war according to rules between adventurers. I'll provide further compensation later, no less than 5,000 verl d'or."
"Alright, Monsieur Ciel." Lugano escorted Lumian out of the room with a smile.
Throughout this process, Lumian observed Doctor's expressions and actions from the corner of his eye, but he didn't detect any abnormalities.
Is this really how he is? There's nothing abnormal about him, or is his acting skills good enough? Lumian looked ahead and descended the stairs steadily.
...
Jenna didn't linger in Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. She swiftly packed her belongings, intending to transfer to Franca's safe house in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.
Despite being a leader of the Savoie Mob and Gardner Martin's mistress, Franca strangely hadn't become a wanted criminal.

However, the Demoness of Pleasure anticipated that she might face arrest by official Beyonders at her residence soon. Therefore, Franca had prepared to move to Trocadéro Town, having packed her own belongings and Jenna's luggage into a Traveler's Bag for a quick escape.

Carrying a brown suitcase, Jenna entered Rue des Blouses Blanches and noticed peculiar symbols in a side alley, resembling child's graffiti—a sign of the Purifiers' request for a meeting.

Jenna hesitated as she walked forward.

Although she had discussed with Lumian, Franca, and Anthony what to say about the previous night's encounter, meeting official Beyonders still felt risky. The unease lingered.

After nearly ten minutes of contemplation, Jenna let out a soft sigh and turned onto Avenue du Marché, making her way towards the alley behind Église Saint-Robert—the designated meeting venue.

Her brother Julien was still in Port LeSeur and would return to Trier in a few months. Jenna aimed to avoid implicating her remaining relative and wanted him to live free from hiding and fear. Her plan was to establish a positive relationship with the Purifiers and entrust them with her brother's safety.

I'm already a Witch who can bring about a catastrophe. I'll shoulder these dark and dangerous matters, Jenna silently muttered to herself, lowering her eyes and quickening her pace.

This time, Valentine and Imre weren't the only ones in the back alley of Église Saint-Robert's cathedral. There was also a man with blond hair, golden eyebrows, and a golden beard, dressed in a brown double-breasted coat.

"This is our deacon, Monsieur Angoulême," Imre introduced. "He attaches great importance to last night's catastrophe and wants to know what information you have."

From their perspective, Celia Bello had close ties to Ciel and Franca. One of them was Gardner Martin's subordinate in two aspects, while the other was his mistress. They were expected to be aware of the riots and anomalies in the market district.

Jenna's role as an informant had prompted the Purifiers, on Angoulême's suggestion, to hold off arresting Franca and Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches. For now, their focus was on making Ciel Dubois, confirmed as a "soldier" of the secret organization, a wanted man.

Jenna averted her gaze from Angoulême's golden buttons and suddenly smiled.

"Are you referring to the catastrophe triggered by the unsealing of Fourth Epoch Trier last night?"

Imre and Valentine were initially dazzled by Jenna's smile, but then their eyes widened in shock at the information she revealed.
Angoulême was taken aback and sighed inwardly, as if he had anticipated this.
Jenna tilted her head slightly and added with a smile, "Would you believe me if I said that I witnessed the beginning of the problem and the ritual's process with my own eyes, and I entered Fourth Epoch Trier yet managed to escape?"
Valentine and Imre's eyes widened as they remained silent, unsure of how to respond.
"Is it related to the Hostel you previously reported?" Angoulême asked in a deep voice.
Jenna tersely acknowledged and nodded.
"Where are Franca and Ciel?" Angoulême inquired.
Jenna replied truthfully, "They've left the market district. They probably won't return."
Angoulême breathed a sigh of relief and said,"Tell me more about your experiences."

Chapter 499: Minor Arcana Card

Jenna briefed the three Purifiers about their investigation of Hostel, emphasizing the encounter with a cyborg monk from the Deep Valley Cloister underground, who carried a load of paints and brushes. As they subsequently investigated, Ciel and she stumbled upon a tunnel collapse during an earthquake-like upheaval, leading them to fall into the painting's world.

Imre couldn't hide his disbelief, interrupting Jenna with a skeptical tone. "You just fell into the painting world like that?"

Seems too coincidental?

The coincidence seems so unreal that even best-selling authors wouldn't concoct such a plot twist!

Valentine muttered to himself, "Could it be a miracle from God?"

Jenna nodded, recalling her initial disbelief when she first laid eyes on the painting's market district. "Yes, it was hard to believe at first."

Angoulême, with a subtle gesture of his right hand, signaled Imre and Valentine not to press further, allowing Celia Bello to continue.

Jenna shifted her focus to Séraphine and Gabriel's detailed description of Hostel, delving into her and Ciel's harrowing escape, encounters with pixies, and the relentless attacks from the other "Rooms."

Upon grasping the significance of "Hostel" and "Rooms," Valentine's mind churned with contemplation, making a vital connection.

"Each room harbors a 'resident,' akin to concealing immense power within one's body, allowing a portion of it to leak out... Where have I seen such a state before..."

As images and information flashed through Valentine's mind, he looked up, interrupting Jenna's narrative with a probing question.

"What's Ciel's true identity?"

When the Purifiers plastered the wanted posters across the city, they were onto Ciel Dubois and his fake identity cooked up by the Savoie Mob. The police headquarters had their hands full interrogating the captured Savoie Mob members, digging for any shreds of information about Ciel Dubois's background.

Jenna understood that now that he was wanted, Ciel couldn't conceal his true identity further. After some consideration, she smiled and said,

"Don't you know?

"His real name is Lumian Lee—also a wanted criminal from Cordu in the south."

Lumian Lee... Valentine's eyelids twitched as he realized his suspicions were correct.

Jenna glanced at him and softly "explained," "Ciel joined the Savoie Mob and the Iron and Blood Cross Order to enhance himself and seek revenge on the evil gods' bestowed. He played a crucial role in this matter. Without his investigation, the Hostel ritual wouldn't have been brought forward, and the catastrophe would have been even more severe. Though he claims it's to finish off the bestowed of evil gods, deep down, he doesn't want others to suffer the same fate after he experienced a disaster."

Valentine's expression eased, revealing a mix of regret and relief.

He sighed, acknowledging, "He is indeed a devout follower of God. Unfortunately, fate and those malevolent forces pushed him into the darkness."

Jenna, muttering silently, A devout follower... I'm afraid you have some unnecessary misunderstandings about Ciel.

Angoulême responded to the revelation with a self-deprecating smile.

"I didn't expect the one preventing the catastrophe from escalating last night to be a wanted criminal, a member of an evil organization. Even without standing in the light, one can still be a hero."

Jenna agreed with this sentiment, choosing not to divulge the pixies' reference to Lumian as Room 1. Instead, she focused on the escape from the painting world, describing their emergence in the wilderness outside Fourth Epoch Trier after passing through the darkness corresponding to the Salle de Bal Brise at sunrise.

She detailed the collapsed grayish-white stone pillar, the distant giant's figure, General Philip's feigned death, the black Primordial Demoness figurine, Mirror Gardner Martin, the terrifying roar, the descending sun, the reddened sky, and the rain of fire. However, she discreetly omitted the specifics of the ensuing battle.

Angoulême and the rest wisely held back from prying too much. Among wild Beyonders, certain intel could fetch a handsome sum, but the details of their abilities and combat techniques were strictly confidential.

"Finally, we obtained the figurine and the fragment left behind by Mirror Gardner, left the seal, and returned to the normal underground," Jenna continued. Though the first half of her sentence wasn't directly related to the second half, it created an impression of how they left Fourth Epoch Trier.

"The complexity of the matter is beyond imagination, and it involves a high-level power," Angoulême sighed softly.

They had no idea what had happened for the sun to rise from the Sacred Heart Cloister last night, nor did they understand why it had fallen into the Fourth Epoch Trier's seal. They felt that it had

something to do with an Angel-level battle.
"Where is the figurine and the mirror fragment?" Valentine asked anxiously.
Jenna couldn't be more honest. "It's with Franca."
Angoulême nodded gently.
"Where's the full-body armor?"
This was linked to the deaths of his two former colleagues.
Of course, Gardner Martin's death could be seen as a form of successful "revenge."
"Magic Mirror Divination revealed a terrifying betrayal curse associated with it. Gardner Martin's fate served as proof. None of us dared to take the risk. Ultimately, we left it with Ciel." Jenna, even as a Witch, found the curse to be exaggerated and ridiculous.
After a brief silence, Angoulême addressed the issue, "If you encounter Ciel again, tell him he can sell us the armor."
Jenna nodded in agreement, and the Purifier deacon got serious.
"The intel you provided is very important. What kind of compensation do you want?"
"The potion formula for Pleasure and all the ingredients," Jenna replied, intending to set a high starting point for negotiation.
This came from years of bargaining experience.
Angoulême glanced at the Witch and said, "Are you planning to leave the market district too?"
"That's right." Jenna smiled sadly and self-deprecatingly. "Witches bring catastrophe. I don't want to impact the people here. No wonder the Witches in stories always live in the dark forest, away from people. However, I'll return occasionally and remain your informant. You can continue to contact me through the agreed method."
Her slightly sad smile prompted an instinctive urge in Imre to look away, wary of falling for her.
"Once we verify the authenticity of your intel, we'll help you apply for the formula and ingredients for Pleasure. I can't guarantee its success. Items at this level require approval from the higher-ups," Angoulême promised without entering into further negotiation.
After bidding farewell to the Purifiers, Jenna picked up her suitcase and took a carriage to Franca's safe house in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.
Once settled, she reflected for a moment and decided to express her gratitude at The Fool's cathedral in Lavigny Docks. She felt compelled to thank this great entity for answering her prayers and enabling Ciel to enter the painting world to provide assistance.
This marked the official commencement of her commitment to Mr. Fool.

In the pristine cathedral with clear windows, Jenna sat at the edge of the last row of pews. She closed her eyes, clasped her hands, brought them to her chest, and bowed her head in prayer.
Amidst the tranquility of the religious space, it felt as if she had entered a deep slumber, her mind empty, and her words mere offerings of praise.
Vaguely, she sensed someone settling beside her.
Ignoring the newcomer, she continued with her prayer.
After a few minutes, she opened her eyes and noticed a petite lady praying beside her.
The lady had shoulder-length yellow hair and wore light pants, a masculine-looking shirt, and a small brown coat.
Although her eyes remained closed, the delicate contours of her brows, mouth, and nose were discernible from her side profile. Despite her lack of height, she exuded a calm and dignified aura.
Sensing Jenna's gaze, the woman opened her eyes and greeted her with a smile.
"Jenna?"
"Yes... Whom am I speaking to?" Jenna felt puzzled and vigilant, but she sensed no danger in Mr. Fool's cathedral.
The young lady introduced herself, "I'm the Major Arcana card holder of the Two of Cups, whom you might know as Franca, Judgment.
"I came to The Fool's cathedral to pray today, not expecting to meet you. Perhaps this is fate. *How about it?* Do you want to draw a Minor Arcana card?"
Feeling the friendliness in her tone, Jenna nodded and said, "I'd be delighted, Madam Judgment."
If it were any other Major Arcana card holder, Jenna might have been instinctively worried, but Franca and Lumian had already mentioned Judgment and Magician to her. She had a natural favorable impression and trust in them.
Judgment retrieved a stack of tarot cards from a small black bag hanging from her waist. She casually cut them a few times and handed them over with a smile.
"Draw one."
Jenna felt inexplicably nervous. After contemplating for a moment, she reached out her right hand and drew a Minor Arcana card.
The card depicted seven cups floating in the clouds, with skulls and people looking at them below.
"Seven of Cups," Madam Judgment chuckled. "This represents confusion, puzzlement, dreams, illusions, and choices. But what's important is not that. Our Tarot Club's two Demonesses drew a Cup

card."
She produced another tarot card, this one portraying an angel sounding a trumpet to guide the departed.
Major Arcana card, Judgment!
"Keep this card. When faced with unforeseen danger, take it out and recite 'Rain Judgment' in Hermes. As long as I'm in Trier, I can provide assistance. Of course, you have to be in Trier too when requesting. Except in places like Fourth Epoch Trier—I won't be able to hear you," Madam Judgment calmly explained.
"Thank you, Madam Judgment," Jenna expressed her gratitude sincerely, accepting the Major Arcana card.
Judgment nodded and continued, "Now, cooperate with the Two of Cups to carry out the Demoness Sect's mission, but with a different direction. Avoid the Demoness Sect and investigate the special mirror worlds. The Demoness of Catastrophe, Krismona, who perished in the Fourth Epoch, is a starting point. She's a child of the Primordial Demoness, a natural-born woman—a pure female Demoness, just like you."

Chapter 500: "Nonexistent" City

The child of the Primordial Demoness must be born as a woman?
Jenna pondered the Sequence name "Witch" and began to grasp its significance.
A god's offspring can't be just ordinary, and being a Sequence 9 or 8 from birth seems impossible, doesn't it?
"Alright," Jenna agreed.
Upon joining the Tarot Club, her initial mission didn't require her to part ways with her companions or expose herself to unnecessary risks, bringing a sense of comfort.
Madam Judgment responded with a smile, saying, "Allow me to update you on the Tarot Club's current situation..."
...
After Anthony Reid left Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, the exhaustion of a sleepless night hit him hard.
As a Psychiatrist, his physical condition hadn't improved much. Staying awake until dawn and enduring severe injuries took a toll. Surviving with the help of the blood-sucking obsidian arrow had left him weakened, having lost a significant amount of blood. Subsequent intense battles and relentless running had drained his stamina, leaving him naturally fatigued and yearning for a bed.
At times like these, he couldn't help but envy the Hunters. Lumian, just one Sequence higher, hadn't slept either. Despite being the main force in both battles, he showed no signs of weariness, appearing energetic enough to take on Gardner Martin once more.
Pressing on, Anthony Reid turned onto Rue Anarchie, entering a brownish-gray house and reaching a corner on the third floor.
This was his safe house, an apartment vacant for a long time.
He believed it unsafe to rent from a landlord or broker for a safe house. Any interaction risked betrayal and tracking. Leveraging his identity as an information broker, he identified unused or abandoned apartments in the market district. If things went awry, he could choose a random one to hide without making contact.
Dusty bed and moldy blanket didn't bother Anthony. He collapsed and quickly succumbed to sleep.
In the hazy dream, clarity and rationality returned suddenly.
Ahead, Avenue du Marché unfolded, a café bustling with patrons and thriving.
Following his peculiar intuition, Anthony Reid passed a golden retriever at the café's entrance and arrived at Booth D by the window.
A lady in a light-green and white dress sat there. Anthony sensed he should see her face clearly, one capable of leaving a stunning

impression, but a clear mental image eluded him.
It was as if all the information had been gathered, but his brain or Body of Heart and Mind struggled to process it.
"Good morning. I'm Justice," the lady introduced herself in a gentle voice, carrying a hint of briskness.
Justice... Anthony had already learned from Lumian and Franca that the secret organization they belonged to was the Tarot Club. Members used tarot cards as code names, with Major Arcana card holders representing key demigod members, and Minor Arcana card holders as peripheral members under the different Major Arcana cards.
Justice was undoubtedly a Major Arcana card.
"Are you going to be my Major Arcana card holder?" Anthony asked respectfully, taking a seat across from her.
Justice smiled.
"You can also choose to switch. It's not that fate can't be changed.
"Of course, some entities don't think so."
The Major Arcana card opposite him was friendly, not imposing at all. She even initiated a joke, easing Anthony's tense heart.
He exhaled quietly and said, "I can draw a card now."
As he finished speaking, a stack of tarot cards appeared in front of him.
Anthony habitually selected one from the middle and placed it on the table.
The Minor Arcana card revealed: a man carrying a sword sitting beneath three hanging swords.
Four of Swords!
"You've already unburdened your heart. The remaining rest and preparation are for propelling yourself further into the future. As a Psychiatrist, this card signals you to be vigilant about your mind at all times. We can shoulder new burdens at any moment, and it's crucial to know how to accept, accommodate, and resolve them," Madam Justice interpreted the Minor Arcana card.
A stack of tarot cards appeared in front of her, noticeably less than before.
With casual ease, she drew a card and placed it at the center of the table.
The card portrayed an impartial goddess seated on a stone chair, wielding a sword and scales—the Justice card from the Major Arcana!
Pushing the Justice card toward Anthony, she smiled and said, "You have two missions now. First, collaborate with the Two of Cups to eliminate Mirror People and investigate the Demoness Sect's predicament. Second, make contact with a covert

organization known as the Psychology Alchemists..."
Psychology Alchemists... Anthony mulled over the name.
After laying out the missions, Justice inquired, "Did they brief you on the specifics of the great existence we're following and the Tarot Club?"
"All I know is that you follow an orthodox god named The Fool and use tarot cards as code names, following His name," Anthony honestly replied.
Before formally joining the Tarot Club, Lumian and Franca had kept details scarce.
Justice chuckled.
"Then allow me to introduce you to our beacon and savior, the great Mr. Fool..."
Her tone held a touch of joy.
...
After leaving Lugano Toscano's secure hideout, Lumian took a carriage to Quartier du Jardin Botanique. He navigated the street named Rue des Pavés in the market district and entered the safe house he had leased earlier.
Ludwig sat on the sofa, engrossed in a novel and indulging in dessert. Lumian glanced at him, sneering, "Escaping the Church of Knowledge doesn't mean you should stoop to reading novels only!"
Ludwig diverted the conversation. "Someone of ill temper sent you a letter. It's in the bedroom."
"Ill-tempered?" Lumian furrowed his brow.
"The one in the golden dress, like a doll," Ludwig replied, not bothering to look up. Midway, he paused to savor a bite of carrot cake, a specialty from the Loen Kingdom.
Madam Magician's messenger... Lumian asked in puzzlement, "Why did she lose her temper at you?"
"I saw her and had a little spat with her," Ludwig replied nonchalantly.
Just an argument? She didn't string you up for a beating? Lumian muttered silently as he entered the bedroom and picked up the folded letter from the desk.
This letter differed from the one that had previously rewarded him. It primarily addressed Lumian's inquiries after acquiring the 0-01 information.
"This seems to be a hint from the Church of Knowledge.
"If you can attain a high position, they are willing to offer some assistance. They might even tacitly permit you to take possession of the Sealed Artifact.
"However, there are two prerequisites. Firstly, you must achieve the status of a Sequence 4 Saint at the very least, possessing

godhood and the qualifications to step onto the chessboard. Secondly, you must have a method to transport that Sealed Artifact without causing harm to the surrounding humans and the environment.
"If you fail to meet these two conditions, the Church of Knowledge won't extend clear support.
"There's also a contradiction for becoming a demigod and how those more formidable than Sequence 5 are unable to approach 0-01. Perhaps there's a hidden message here, suggesting that after proving your ability to advance to Sequence 4, but before consuming the potion through a ritual, entering the City of Exiles, Morora, and approaching 0-01 is the next step. Leave a mark or achieve something to lay the groundwork for controlling it when you advance to a higher Sequence.
"As for their specific expectations, I cannot discern them at the moment.
"In simple terms, if you demonstrate and prove your potential, the Church of Knowledge is willing to support your bid for the Red Priest position, competing against Red Angel Medici. Does that surprise you? Are you excited?"
Surprise? More like shock! Lumian had never truly entertained the idea of becoming a true god.
Despite not being a devout believer, he had grown up in a society influenced by such beliefs. His exposure to the mystical world was relatively recent, making the notion of "I too can become a god; I also want to become a god" unlikely.
As for the terror and might of Red Angel Medici, Lumian had witnessed it in Fourth Epoch Trier.
The prospect of becoming enemies with such a formidable entity and vying for the Red Priest's deity position instinctively struck him as absurd and meaningless.
What's the fundamental difference between this and Aurore's jest during combat class, claiming you've mastered basic combat techniques and can now slay a god?
As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian suddenly muttered to himself, If I become a true god, can I resurrect Aurore...
After a moment of silence, he smiled self-deprecatingly and said, "Even deities can perish, and may not be resurrected."
Madam Magician mentioned that the betrayal curse of the Pride Armor stems from the aversion and hatred of a deity before Their demise... However, according to the information she provided, the Pride Armor first appeared at the end of the all-out war in the Northern Continent. Did a true god perish back then?

The abilities of the Pride Armor clearly belong to the Warrior pathway... The one who perished was the God of War? But in the Feysac Empire, the Church of the God of Combat is still fine. Uh, that's what the newspapers, magazines, and merchants said...
Lumian pondered for a moment but couldn't come to a conclusion. He shifted his gaze back to the letter.
"I never intended for you to pursue the Red Priest's deity position, actually. I believed that with an Angel sealed within you and a changed fate, there was a chance for you to become a High-Sequence Beyonder. Now, follow your heart's desires. Our Tarot Club is here to support you.
"However, there's something to be cautious about:
"I went to Lenburg and consulted a few local scholars known for their knowledge, but none of them have heard of the City of Exiles, Morora.
"In the eyes of ordinary people and even the lower- and middle-class clergymen of the Church of Knowledge, this city is nonexistent and unrecorded."

Chapter 501: Honorific Name

City of Exiles, Morora, doesn't exist? When Lumian perused the information Ludwig had "stolen," he couldn't shake the sensation that Morora was vivid and right before him. This stemmed from the fact that the scribe had meticulously chronicled every folklore and characteristic of the city. Even those who hadn't set foot there could conjure a mental image.

Yet, Madam Magician had just dropped the bombshell—the City of Exiles, Morora, didn't exist in Lenburg!

I read it so intently, feeling so nervous and afraid. Finally, you tell me, 'I'm sorry, I made all this up?' As Lumian grappled with the absurdity, his gaze reverted to the letter, eager to uncover Madam Magician's speculations.

The Major Arcana card holder teased, "Perhaps the individual who penned this Sealed Artifact information had already lost their sanity, conjuring the City of Exiles, Morora.

"Maybe it's a colossal prison nestled in the mountains, patrolled by guards. They provide supplies unattainable independently and remain cut off from the outside world.

"Perhaps Morora is genuinely an imagined City of Exiles, yet, in a peculiar way, it already exists...

"Don't dismiss the first and third conjectures as absurd or hyperbolic, making them implausible. Let me enlighten you; when dealing with Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, numerous things defy common sense and intuition. Especially when we're talking about 0-01.

"Personally, I fancy the first conjecture. It emanates a fantastical beauty. A deranged Keeper jotting down information about a Sealed Artifact, filled with ramblings and delusions, and treating it as reality. But what about the truth? Where did it vanish to? Is it no longer in place?"

At the sight of this, Lumian felt an inexplicable chill, and his hair stood on end.

Madam Magician had expounded terrifying possibilities. Moreover, she had employed seemingly casual strokes, brisk descriptions, and a barrage of questions to cultivate an atmosphere of composure and distortion, pushing one's nerves to the brink. Prolonged contemplation of it could drive one to the brink of insanity.

Isn't this superior to the narrative prowess of most current bestselling authors in crafting horror tales? Lumian critiqued his Major Arcana card holder.

Shaking his head, he relegated 0-01 and the City of Exiles to the

recesses of his mind.
He feared that dwelling on it might tip him into madness.
It wasn't out of the realm of possibility. Lumian hadn't slept since perusing the information. While he leveraged the 6 a.m. reset of his body every morning to alleviate fatigue, he occasionally heard indescribable and spine-chilling voices resembling calls from the depths of the mountains.
Phew... Lumian exhaled and resumed reading the letter.
"Alright, I won't terrify you any longer. In essence, until you truly confront 0-01, don't summarily dismiss any conjecture or potentiality.
"I've verified the auditory hallucinations you mentioned. It's a mild corruption induced by delving into 0-01's information. Some entities can induce corruption merely by knowing their names instead of their code names. Fortunately, your destiny is entwined with that long-named fellow. To some extent, it's akin to having the status of an Angel. Furthermore, you bear Mr. Fool's seal, the Blood Emperor's aura, and other high-level paraphernalia. That's why you only experienced a faint auditory hallucination and sensed the beckoning. You didn't suddenly descend into paranoia and extremism, harboring a desire to seek treasure in the mountains before vanishing one night."
Madam Magician revels in spinning horror stories. She insists on expanding concise explanations into potential scenarios for me... Lumian had been in correspondence with his Major Arcana card holder for quite some time, becoming well-acquainted with her choice of words and writing style.
"Let me remind you that you're akin to an Angel to some extent, yet you won't succumb to the corruption associated with higher Sequences. That's what sets you apart. It's why you can venture into many peculiar places. Hence, some entities seek to exploit this. Exercise caution and vigilance, continually scrutinizing yourself.
"By the way, Miss Justice and Judgment extend their gratitude. The revelation of 0-01 and Vermonda Sauron's whereabouts allowed them to fulfill a mission entrusted by Mr. Fool before his slumber. Hence, the rewards are particularly generous this time...
"Your concerns are valid. If you miss the initial trail, whether it's Bard, Mad Lady, or the traces left by other key members of April Fool's, it's more likely a trap than a clue. Of course, traps can yield certain information. As long as you can withstand the associated peril, you might uncover the architect of the trap.
"If, and I say if, you chance upon a High-Sequence Beyonder of the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways while delving into the

whereabouts of the key members of April Fool's, you can invoke my name and seek my assistance.
"Remember, this is my name. It carries the power to conceal secrets from others.
"Cosmic Traveler, beholden to the King of Yellow and Black, and the Sorcerer chronicling the world."
The King of Yellow and Black is an alias for Mr. Fool... Cosmic Traveler and chronicling the world sounds amazing... *Could she truly be the Angel of Stars from the Bible?* As Lumian committed it to memory, he witnessed the honorific name gradually fading, as if erased and consumed by the void.
At the conclusion of the letter, Madam Magician added: "The Minor Arcana, Knight of Swords, subordinate to Ma'am Hermit, journeyed to Feynapotter a few months ago for a certain matter. When you arrive there, should you require assistance or information, you can reach out to him.
"His messenger is:
"A peculiar creature wandering above the world, a half-fairy who fiddles with melodic strings, a messenger that belongs solely to the Knight of Swords."
Half-fairy... Lumian had skimmed through information about such spirit world creatures, mainly to select a suitable contract partner. He hadn't delved into the details, making it challenging to recall.
Simultaneously, he noted that the Knight of Swords's messenger incantation deviated from the conventional format. Perhaps there was concern that foes could decipher the correct three-line description and summon the messenger to target him.
Regardless, with the limiting phrase "a messenger that belongs solely to the Knight of Swords," the second sentence didn't necessarily have to depict a creature friendly to humans. However, since it could serve as the messenger of the Knight of Swords, it could tacitly be considered as friendly to humans.
Lumian reread Madam Magician's letter from start to finish, mindful not to overlook any crucial information embedded in her cryptic statements.
Suddenly, a knock echoed on the bedroom door.
Lumian glanced up, and the door creaked open. Ludwig stuck his chubby head out and, in a daze, uttered, "I'm hungry. It's time for you to cook."
"Didn't you just eat plenty of cake and crackers?" Lumian's lips twitched.
Ludwig replied seriously, "That's dessert, not the main course."
Subtly, he licked his lips.

"Moreover, your culinary skills are quite impressive, and those dishes are quite unique. With a chef around, I don't want to settle for raw beef, hard bread, and freshly bought potatoes."
The boy's expression turned pleading.
Lumian scoffed.
"Why don't you do it yourself?"
"I can only cook by myself after I recover a little," Ludwig replied subconsciously before changing his tone. "I'm still a child. You're actually asking me to cook in the kitchen? Aren't you afraid that I'll be injured by a knife or burned?"
I'm just afraid you'll eat the knife... *What does it mean to cook after recovering a little?* Is Chef a higher rank than your current Sequence's strength? Can't you cook if you're not a chef? Lumian observed Ludwig leaning against the door frame, looking at him with expectant brown eyes, and suddenly found the scene familiar.
In the past, he had begged his sister Aurore in the same way.
Lumian sighed and stood up.
"I'm only responsible for three meals. The rest of the time, rely on dessert, bread, and cold dishes. Don't bother me."
As he spoke, he left the bedroom and entered the kitchen.
While donning an apron and engrossed in cooking, Ludwig, in a caramel coat, waited at the kitchen door, occasionally wiping his mouth.
After pan-frying a steak, Lumian picked it up and casually tossed it out.
Ludwig deftly caught it, tore it in a few bites, and stuffed it down his abdomen.
Observing this, Lumian chuckled inwardly, feeling that this fellow was even more absurd than he had been back then.
...
In Underground Trier, within a quarry cave.
Lumian stood before the altar, encircled by the recently dismantled wall of spirituality.
He had completed the Contractee summoning ritual and gained two new contracted abilities. Now, he awaited Franca and the others to witness who could successfully gain a messenger.
One of these abilities was Shadow Transformation. It allowed Lumian to authentically morph into a shadow, merging with it to conceal himself and move stealthily—a skill he currently lacked.
While such abilities existed in the mystical knowledge of Contractees, Lumian opted to acquire them from the spirit world creature information provided by Madam Magician. This prevented the bestowed of Inevitability from discerning the

negative effects he might endure.
Ultimately, Lumian contracted a spirit world creature known as Long Shadow. He sacrificed six servings of fresh cow and sheep meat in exchange for this ability, making him more susceptible to sunlight than ordinary humans.
This wasn't as severe as the aversion Vampires had to sunlight. Lumian could endure it with his Ascetic endurance.
Another ability he had acquired was the Bottle of Fiction. He found the unique and practical ability demonstrated by the padre intriguing. It could effectively screen an enemy, creating a concealed space where the other party couldn't escape and could only exit through the bottle's opening; traps could be added.
Since no spirit world creature could provide this ability, Lumian summoned the creature called the Fantasy Face and completed the contract with a bottle of blood with strong spirituality.
The blood needed to come from a Beyonder above Sequence 7 or a corresponding Beyonder creature. Lumian, naturally, wouldn't use his own blood, as sacrificing it to the Fantasy Face could gradually transform him into a monster. Instead, he used the blood Madam Magician extracted from Gardner Martin's corpse—one of the supplementary ingredients for a Reaper. It was substantial, and there was plenty.
The corresponding downside was a trace of greed.
Before long, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony arrived at the quarry cave, one after another.

Chapter 502: Messenger Ritual

Anthony stared at the altar, the flickering candlelight casting shadows on his face. He voiced his concerns and uncertainties about having their own messenger.

"Can we really have our own messenger?"

His knowledge of mysticism hinted that messengers were a rare occurrence. Only Beyonders of specific pathways at a certain Sequence or high-level Beyonders with godhood possessed these special contracted creatures, accessible at any time and summoned by others.

Franca, grinning, reassured him, "Other Beyonders might not cut it, but we still have a chance.

"There are three prerequisites for possessing a messenger. First, you need to understand spirit world creatures, knowing which ones can be used as messengers. You must grasp their characteristics and devise incantations for precise summoning. Second, the spirit world creature must be willing to respond to the summoning and not reject signing a contract to become your messenger. Third, you need a unique undead contract and a deity to bear witness, restraining both parties and clarifying their responsibilities.

"See, there aren't any restrictions on pathways and Sequences among these three. There are only hidden restrictions, but there are ways to bypass them.

"For ordinary Beyonders, the first requirement is the toughest. Usually, they lack a deep understanding of spirit world creatures. Summoning one might make them tremble with fear, afraid the incantation could lead to a monster that could harm their family. With time, they might rely on their predecessors' experiences to accumulate reliable summoning incantations, but most have nothing to do with a messenger.

"We're different. As members of the Tarot Club, we have Madam Magician, an expert in spirit world creatures. Ciel has a pile of information on them. Madam Magician selected 30 spirit world creatures suitable for being a messenger, some with a desire to serve as a Mid-Sequence Beyonder's messenger. This allows us to skip the greatest obstacle.

"Otherwise, consider the speed at which spirit world creatures traverse. Some messengers can cover the distance from southern Intis to Trier in just a few minutes. Others take ten minutes to half an hour, while some may take half a day or even a full day. Without knowledge, signing a messenger that takes half a year or one year to cover such a distance is pointless."

"My name isn't Ciel Dubois anymore," Lumian reminded Franca after she finished explaining a portion of the knowledge to Anthony and Jenna, who were novices in the mysticism world.
Franca let out a hollow laugh.
"Isn't it just a habit of the mouth? When I first met you, your name was Ciel. I've been calling you that for months."
She continued, "The second prerequisite is that we have a way to bypass it. Beyonders of pathways like Corpse Collector, affiliated with the undead and other creatures in the spirit world, can make them willing to be summoned. Then, it's possible to sign a messenger contract. At the Sequence of Spirit Guide, they can even semi-compulsively turn a target they fancy into their messenger. Without such specialties, one can often only rely on their status to suppress and intimidate them.
"As for us, we follow Mr. Fool. You've all heard the Church's bible, so you should know that Mr. Fool is the great ruler who controls the spirit world. Strictly speaking, those spirit world creatures are under his control. As members of the Tarot Club, summoning spirit world creatures and signing a messenger contract with them will definitely be much easier. In particular, Lumian here has Mr. Fool's power. Have you ever seen him fail in summoning spirit world creatures? At most, it's vague. What comes isn't what he wants.
"The third prerequisite is that Madam Magician has already given Lumian a special undead contract, specially prepared for messengers. The witness should be Death, but they can be replaced by an Angel from the Underworld or the undead domain. And there's an Angel of Death by Mr. Fool's throne. He's the Consul of the Underworld!
"Actually, I don't think it's a problem to use Mr. Fool's honorific name directly. Would spirit world creatures not obey the orders of the great ruler who controls the spirit world?"
The information from Madam Magician contained a four-line description targeting the Underworld, suitable as a witness.
Jenna and Anthony absorbed the mysticism knowledge attentively, realizing its value in explaining many problems in ordinary summoning rituals.
Once Franca had concluded her instructional role, Lumian produced a carefully selected stack of information about spirit world creatures and directed his attention to Jenna.
"You first."
Jenna, pointing at herself in confusion and surprise, asked, "Me?"
She was a complete novice at summoning rituals.
Lumian let out a chuckle.

"You have the lucky gold coin. According to Madam Magician, it has a certain connection to Mr. Fool, equivalent to his memento. This will make you more likely to summon a specific creature and complete the messenger contract than Franca and Anthony.
"My chances of success should be about the same as yours, but I have a lot of messy things on me. I'm afraid it'll cause an anomaly and ruin the rest of tonight's attempts, so I'll be the last."
Jenna considered Lumian's explanation and agreed.
Muttering under her breath, she took the document and flipped to the page she had chosen earlier.
It recorded a spirit world creature she was relatively familiar with: "Rabbit of Knowledge."
However, this wasn't an ordinary Rabbit of Knowledge; it had absorbed some specific knowledge and undergone a special mutation to become suitable as a messenger.
Jenna had a positive impression of the Rabbit of Knowledge. She found it friendly and willing to help humans, making it her preferred choice from the beginning.
Additionally, its silly appearance added to its charm.
Retrieving the page of information, Jenna entered the altar. Recalling Franca's teachings and the mystical knowledge from the Witch potion, she swiftly sanctified the ritual silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality.
Having completed all the preparations, Jenna took two steps back, focused on the candle flame, and uttered a concise and forceful word in ancient Hermes.
"I!"
Then, she switched to Hermes.
"I summon in my name:
"Rabbit-shaped spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a friendly creature that can be communicated with, a runner who pursues knowledge."
In this modified incantation, the original "weakling" was replaced with "runner" to specifically denote the special Rabbit of Knowledge.
The candle flame abruptly shifted to a dark green hue, expanding to the size of a human head.
A translucent creature resembling a rabbit emerged from the dark-green candle flame.
Unlike other Rabbits of Knowledge, its eyes emitted a wise glint, and it held a blurry book with an orange-red cover in its hand.
Its legs were powerful, indicating its proficiency in running.
Jenna couldn't contain her joy at successfully summoning it on her first attempt.

Slightly perturbed, she addressed the creature in ancient Hermes, "Are you willing to become my messenger?"
The mutated Rabbit of Knowledge glanced at Jenna and asked in Intisian, "Have you ever called my kind fools or idiots before?"
"No," Jenna replied sincerely. "I curse occasionally, but it's not directed at anyone. It's just an expression of my emotions."
Occasionally? Lumian mocked Jenna inwardly.
The mutated Rabbit of Knowledge observed Jenna intently, somehow confirming that she wasn't lying.
However, this might have been more of a formality, as the answer of not having engaged in name-calling was sufficient. Whether it was entirely true or not seemed inconsequential.
The rabbit nodded and said, "You have to pay me. Every time you summon me, you have to give me a book or knowledge of equal value. You can give it to me directly or burden the person who's writing to you."
It agreed just like that? Having name-called it in the past, I can't summon this rabbit as a messenger? Well, I can't summon it now either. There should only be one special Rabbit of Knowledge that has evolved to be capable of being a messenger... Lumian knew it was generally easy to deal with, but he didn't expect it to be so amiable.
Jenna glanced at the information placed at the edge of the altar, noticing a notification: "The knowledge you feed the Rabbit of Knowledge determines what it will become in the future."
Will reading more postman-related books improve its awareness and abilities as a messenger? Jenna wondered to herself as she replied, "No problem. Let's sign a contract."
Following the template provided by Madam Magician, she used the dark-red fountain pen on the altar to swiftly write a contract on the yellowish-brown goatskin, outlining the agreed compensation.
The contract was composed in ancient Hermes, with every word seeming to resonate with the forces of nature and the spirit world. Jenna had utilized her usual studies and the knowledge from the Witch potion to quickly grasp this Beyonder language.
In addition to the contract, Jenna penned a description of the mysticism related to the Underworld.
"The home of all death, the hell hidden deep within the spirit world, the witness of the decay of all living things, one that solely belongs to the kingdom of Death."
As she wrote, the ancient Hermes words burned with dark-green flames, including the original ones.
Remembering Lumian's earlier advice, Jenna deliberately included a clause fixing the summoning incantation as "Rabbit-shaped

spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a runner who pursues knowledge, a messenger that belongs solely to the Seven of Cups."
Still cautious about revealing her real name, Jenna refrained from using it. She worried that someone familiar with her messenger summoning incantation might uncover her true identity, potentially implicating her brother Julien in the future.
After scanning the contract and confirming its accuracy, Jenna signed her code name.
The goatskin floated up and flew toward the mutated Rabbit of Knowledge.
Picking up another fountain pen, the Rabbit of Knowledge wrote its name: "Chasel Sávio."
"You have a name?" Lumian was a little surprised.
He was also within the wall of spirituality.
"I named it myself after reading a book. It's my name now," replied Rabbit Chasel as the ghastly green flames on the goatskin merged, incinerating the contract into ashes and transforming it into an invisible force.
Jenna breathed a sigh of relief and engaged in a brief conversation with Rabbit Chasel before concluding, "I! I end this summoning in my name."
Rabbit Chasel returned to the spirit world, and Franca eagerly watched as the wall of spirituality dissipated before stepping into the altar.
Jenna's ease had filled her with confidence.
However, she faced a shameful failure.

Chapter 503: Penitent

Franca attempted summoning five different spirit world creatures. Despite her successful summonings, none of the spirit world creatures were willing to sign a contract and become her messenger.

The repeated failures struck her hard, and her disappointment and frustration were evident from her blank expression.

Nevertheless, she didn't let her emotions dictate her actions. Undeterred, she proceeded to summon the remaining 24 spirit world creatures.

The situation was becoming increasingly clear—success, if achievable, would happen in the first few attempts!

Jenna glanced at the disappointed Franca.

"Give it a try when your Sequence is higher."

Franca grumbled, "When I reach a higher Sequence, I might use a mirror and the mirror world to send messages. Why would I need a messenger? Why aren't there any spirit world creatures tempted by a Demoness's charm and willing to become a messenger?"

Lumian let out a chuckle.

"I've seen something similar in the information about spirit world creatures. Would you like to give it a try?"

Despite her reluctance to admit defeat, Franca remained pragmatic. She cursed, "Forget it, forget it. Such spirit world creatures are definitely dangerous. All they can think about is dragging a Demoness into the spirit world. Even delivering a letter will help me turn my friend into an enemy."

Seeing that she had calmed down, Anthony Reid, a fellow novice in ritualistic magic, made his attempt.

Like Franca, he too faced a series of challenges. Five attempts were made, with two summoning failures and three unsuccessful contract formations.

"Looks like I can't have a messenger for the time being," Anthony sighed with a bitter smile.

Franca's emotions eased significantly.

She wasn't alone in facing difficulties.

"Which one do you want to summon?" she asked Lumian curiously.

"The coolest one." Lumian, maintaining an air of nonchalance, sanctified the ritual silver dagger and recreated the spiritual barrier.

Focusing on the burning candle flames, he took steps back, alternating between ancient Hermes and Hermes.

"I!

"I summon in my name:
"A creature wandering above the world, the penitent who awakens from the flames of pain, a friendly person corrupted by darkness."
This summoning incantation, unique information from Madam Magician, deviated from the norm. It wasn't just a spirit but a creature wandering above the world. The latter descriptions combined encounters and characteristics, adding an intriguing layer to the summoning.
Lumian found the temperament and style of this particular creature impressive and decided to make it his first attempt. He sought a messenger capable of delivering a letter and traversing the spirit world, indifferent to other considerations. *Why not choose the coolest one?*
As the incantation echoed, the candle flame expanded, acquiring a dark-green hue bordering on black.
With each intensifying flicker, a figure materialized.
It was a tall, human-like being dressed in deep-black robes reminiscent of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church clergy.
However, his exposed face and limbs bore the marks of prolonged incineration, leaving only bones and charred flesh. Empty eye sockets glowed with dark flames, while strange, viscous black flames lingered, causing perpetual pain to the spirit.
Lumian gazed at the Penitent and asked in ancient Hermes, "Are you willing to become my messenger?"
Responding in ancient Feysac, the source of several Northern Continent languages, the Penitent offered a condition,
"If you're not concerned about being implicated by me and slowly slipping into the darkness, I can help you deliver letters."
No compensation, but there's latent danger? Since Madam Magician provided the Penitent's information, it means I can bear it... Lumian, who had too much mysticism "debt" to worry about, smiled and said,
"That depends on whether you and darkness can win the tug-of-war. No problem. I was mentally prepared for this before summoning you."
This time, he switched to ancient Feysac to communicate with the other party. After all, it was quite troublesome to use ancient Hermes, which could stir the power of nature, to say so much.
Soon, he drafted the contract and penned the four-line mysticism description representing the Underworld's representative as witness.
Illuminated by ancient Hermes words engulfed in ghastly green flames, Lumian fixed the summoning incantation to: "A creature wandering above the world, the penitent who awakens from the

flames of pain, a messenger that belongs solely to Lumian Lee."
Lumian didn't adopt a code name like Jenna and the Knight of Swords. After all, those who knew about his messenger might not know that he was a Minor Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club. This was the self-cultivation of a veteran spy, and it didn't matter if Lumian Lee's name and corresponding background were known.
With his name penned down, Lumian witnessed the yellowish-brown goatskin fly towards the black-robed Penitent.
The Penitent signed his name: Baynfel.
The ghastly green flames intertwined, consuming the contract and seamlessly merging with the spirit world.
Curious about his new messenger, Lumian queried Penitent Baynfel, "What are you penitent about?"
However, Baynfel remained silent, and a viscous black flame descended from his body, disappearing into the soil.
Despite Lumian's persistent questioning, Baynfel kept his silence.
Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Very good. All hairdressers should learn from you," before concluding the summoning.
After he dismantled the wall of spirituality, Franca looked at him with a resentful expression.
"You succeeded on the first try?"
"I succeeded on the first try." Lumian lacked any evident joy, as if he was talking about something ordinary.
Perplexed and unable to let go of her own failures, Franca questioned, "Why? Why aren't Anthony and I popular with the spirit world creatures? Why?"
It had to be said that the Demoness of Pleasure was quite charming. Seeing Franca like this, Ascetic Lumian wanted to walk up to her, raise his right hand, and flick her forehead.
It made him want to bully her!
He pondered for a moment.
"I roughly understand the reason. Being a Minor Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club increases our chances of successfully summoning special spirit world creatures. Even a Psychiatrist like Anthony succeeded several times during his first ritualistic magic.
"However, to gain their favor or obedience, you need a higher level, a special pathway, or something related to Mr. Fool. For example, Jenna's lucky gold coin and Mr. Fool's power on me."
A sudden realization struck Lumian.
If that's the reason, does the Knight of Swords, who also possesses a messenger, have something similar?
"I see!" Franca, buoyed by this insight, regained confidence.
It wasn't that there was a problem with her; she simply lacked a "prop."

She then looked at Jenna, contemplating whether to borrow the lucky gold coin to complete the messenger contract.
Franca eventually dismissed the idea. There was a significant mysticism difference between "ownership" and "loaning." She was afraid that Jenna wouldn't be able to handle it if she were to give it and take it back in the future without a unique opportunity.
Phew... Franca exhaled and was about to inquire when Lumian planned to leave Trier and how, when she noticed her companion's inexplicable silence and a hint of dejection.
"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, concerned.
"Nothing." Lumian shook his head.
He suddenly remembered that Aurore had once yearned for a messenger.
Anthony glanced at Lumian, but no words were exchanged. Jenna brought up the Purifiers' Deacon Angoulême's proposal to purchase the Pride Armor, prompting Lumian to fall into a brief silence before chuckling.
"I'll decide after some time."
Despite recognizing the danger of the Pride Armor, Lumian acknowledged its formidable power. It could pose a threat to all Beyonders below the demigod level. If wearing it was the key to defeating Loki and other key members of April Fool's, Lumian wouldn't hesitate to use it, prepared to face the consequences.
Lumian wouldn't give up on the Sealed Artifact just because it was dangerous, until he eliminated all those scoundrels or until he was too strong for Pride Armor.
"Alright," Franca inquired, "Are you leaving Trier tomorrow? Will you take a boat, a steam locomotive, or seek the spirit world's coordinates from Madam Magician and 'teleport' there?"
Lumian chuckled.
"All of them are possible. I'll decide tomorrow. Let's see what fate has in mind."
Franca muttered, "When did you learn to act all mysterious..."
...
After bidding farewell to his three companions, Lumian adorned the silver Lie earring and subtly altered his hair color and appearance. Making his way down Avenue du Marché into Rue Anarchie, he arrived at Auberge du Coq Doré's underground bar.
Seemingly unaffected by the previous night's catastrophe, the bar retained its lively atmosphere. Regular patrons occupied their usual spots—some singing loudly, others dancing around small round tables, and a few engaged in gambling with alcohol as stakes.
Charlie, now in a black coat, stood at a small round table,

enthusiastically exclaiming, "You might not know this, but Ciel Dubois and I are friends. We've been through life and death together! Look, look, his bounty has been updated to 60,000 verl d'or! What a substantial sum!"
You're quite proud of me... Lumian scoffed and settled at the bar, ordering a glass of absinthe.
In the midst of the commotion, he silently listened, savoring the bitter liquor.
Pavard Neeson, the proprietor wiping glasses, noticed the new face and smilingly inquired, "Have you just arrived in the market district?"
"Yes," Lumian responded in a deep voice.
Pavard Neeson said gently, "You seem to have a story."
Lumian sighed, taking a sip of the dreamy La Fée Verte. With a self-deprecating smile, he said, "I'm a nobody..."

Chapter 504: "Breakup"

"In an instant, I found myself with no alternative but to depart. Staying put was not an option. Besides, lingering too long might jeopardize my friend and jeopardize the fortune he had tirelessly amassed.

Lumian raised the emerald-green absinthe to his lips once more.

Pavard Neeson, the proprietor of the bar, gently placed his glass on the counter and let out a sigh.

"That's truly unfortunate."

A sly grin played on Lumian's lips.

"Alright, I've wrapped up my tale. How about a complimentary drink on the house?"

Pavard, his ponytail giving him a somewhat artistic appearance, was momentarily taken aback.

...

Minutes before the stroke of midnight, Charlie, clad in a black coat, exited the basement bar of Auberge du Coq Doré and retraced his steps to his rented apartment.

Under the gentle autumn night sky, a soothing breeze played, neither bone-chilling nor overly brisk. It seemed to cleanse both body and mind with each inhale. Charlie couldn't resist taking a deep breath.

"Dogsh*t, which drunkard peed all over the place again?" The foul odor in the air soured Charlie's mood.

At that very moment, a silhouette emerged from the shadows up ahead.

The figure boasted golden-black hair, piercing blue eyes, and a strikingly handsome face—none other than Ciel Dubois.

Haven't you left Trier? Charlie's heart surged with joy, ready to inquire further.

But almost instantly, he caught sight of the dark expression on Ciel's face, as if a tempest brewed within his eyes.

Charlie jumped in fright, his thoughts racing. Instinctively, he said, "I-I was going to let you know..."

Before he could finish, Lumian materialized before him, his right fist meeting Charlie's face with a solid impact.

The force sent golden specks dancing in Charlie's vision. He teetered backward, struggling to maintain his balance.

Lumian's countenance darkened as he spoke, "Considering our past friendship, I won't kill you this time."

With that, he pivoted in his dark jacket and strode towards a dimly lit alley, away from the glow of street lamps.

Clutching his throbbing face, Charlie watched Ciel vanish into the

shadows. Anxious and incensed, he blurted out, "But I couldn't locate you! How was I supposed to inform you that you're wanted?"
Lumian offered no response, disappearing into the alley.
Rooted to the spot, Charlie couldn't suppress his curses.
Frustration and resentment welled up within him.
Why did he suddenly become so unreasonable?
It's not my fault you're wanted. I've done my utmost to help!
I'm just a clerk; there's a limit to what I can accomplish!
...
The next morning, Charlie had just settled into his subterranean office at Église Saint-Robert, armed with a meatloaf. Before he could even start brewing a cup of coffee, he spotted Angoulême, the deacon clad in a brown double-breasted coat, heading his way.
"Morning, Deacon," Charlie exclaimed, rising to his feet and greeting him with eager deference.
Angoulême glanced at the bruises on his left cheek.
"What happened? Did you get into a scuffle?"
"Oh, no, not at all! I, uh, collided—with a statue!" Charlie suddenly grew jittery and waved his hand dismissively. "It might sound unbelievable, but those lunatics get wild when they're drunk. Some rant about toppling the government, others believe their vomit is gourmet cuisine, and a few decide to relocate hefty statues to random corners. I accidentally bumped into one."
Angoulême maintained a steady gaze on the clerk and spoke with measured calmness,
"Your lies lack finesse. Do you recall the clause in the contract about not concealing crucial information?"
Charlie's expression stiffened, his lips faltering before he stammered, "I-it's Ciel. Ciel Dubois attacked me. Perhaps he's resentful because I didn't notify him beforehand about being wanted by us."
Angoulême listened in silence. After a brief pause, he remarked, "Very well. That's more like what a competent Purifier clerk should be. Where did you encounter him?"
"Right outside Auberge du Coq Doré, just past the first alley leading to Avenue du Marché," Charlie responded, a blend of nervousness and concern coloring his voice.
Angoulême delved into further details and said to Charlie, "Given that Ciel Dubois's true circumstances surpassed our expectations, we scrutinized all the files associated with him. It came to light that you share a close bond with him and that he was implicated in Susanna Mattise's Beyonder case. Upon including him in that matter, it became apparent that you concealed numerous details."
Charlie, upon hearing the deacon's words, stiffened, beads of cold

sweat forming on his forehead.
"I-I..." He faltered, unable to find words, as if the specter of his impending doom loomed large.
At that moment, Angoulême took the initiative to ask, "Did Ciel force you to hide these details?"
"No, it wasn't coercion," Charlie responded instinctively, quickly adding, "He requested it."
"As expected, a request," Angoulême nodded thoughtfully and probed into every nuance of the Susanna Mattise incident.
With his psychological defenses stripped away, Charlie laid bare every detail to the Purifier deacon.
Upon concluding his account, Angoulême spoke with gravity, "For someone in your position as a Purifier clerk, concealing vital case details would typically lead to immediate dismissal, if not imprisonment..."
Though Charlie had braced himself for such a repercussion, the actual words felt like a blow to the head. His body swayed, teetering on the brink of imbalance.
Before he could mount a plea, Angoulême shifted the conversation.
"However, your recent performance has been commendable. You've shown diligence, dedication, and commitment to your studies. Moreover, it appears you haven't leaked information to Ciel, caushing his resentment towards you.
"As the deacon of the market district's Inquisition, I'm inclined not to cast aside someone who has earnestly climbed out of the abyss and crush their last hope. Given your clean record after becoming a Purifier clerk and the authenticity of the Susanna Mattise incident, I'm offering you another chance. I can't just push you out and wait for Ciel to kill you or the Mother Tree of Desire's bestowed to find you again, can I?
"You'll be terminated, but you can intern here. Your salary will revert to the intern level for six months. If you excel and avoid errors during this period, you may be rehired. Otherwise, you'll be asked to leave immediately.
"In simpler terms, your punishment is a six-month probation."
Charlie, upon hearing these words, felt a surge of relief, as if he had plummeted into hell only to be yanked back into heaven.
In a frenzy of gratitude, he slumped back into his seat, drained of strength.
As Angoulême departed, Charlie's mind reeled, scenes flashing before his eyes.
After a few seconds, he raised his right hand and delivered a self-inflicted slap.
Muttering in frustration and regret, he reflected,

"To think, last night at the bar, I boasted about Ciel and me being friends who had faced life and death together..."

...

Shortly after returning to his office, Angoulême received a telegram.

It originated from Saint Vièvе Cathedral's Plessy Descartes, overseeing the Trier diocese.

The Cardinal summoned Angoulême to Saint Vièvе Cathedral for a discussion.

Saint Vièvе Cathedral.

Ascending a dazzling staircase to an area near the dome, a small room awaited. It stood as one of the places in Trier closest to the sun.

Clad in a white robe adorned with golden threads, Cardinal Plessy spent his days here, bathed in holy light.

An elderly man with high cheekbones and grizzled blond hair, his demeanor lacked sternness, yet a radiant glow made direct eye contact impossible, rendering the room eerily devoid of shadows.

"While you faced challenges during the recent catastrophe due to unforeseen events and intel disruptions, your ability to grasp crucial information and manage subsequent arrangements was noteworthy. We haven't overlooked your performance in the market district over the past year," Plessy commended amicably.

"Praise the Sun!" Angoulême proclaimed, extending his arms in acknowledgment of the Lord's glory.

Plessy's satisfaction deepened.

"In light of the current circumstances and the foreseeable future, we intend to establish three Purifier teams directly under the Trier diocese. This will provide flexibility in handling various Beyonder incidents."

At this point, the Cardinal offered a rare smile.

"You've been swamped with work for the past six months. Privately, you've voiced concerns about lacking leisure time. Do not blame yourself; it's a common human experience. As a deacon in the Trier diocese, you should find more leisure time. Your role will involve addressing cases beyond the capacity or timeframe of the Purifiers in the districts.

"Of course, this also entails risk. You must comprehend this clearly.

"François, Sequence 4 marks a qualitative transformation. Many within the Inquisition are aspiring to become Saints. If you wish to surpass them, you must make remarkable contributions. The first step is to become a deacon of a small team under a large diocese. The second step involves amassing contributions and wielding a

Holy Artifact. The third step is to await an opportune moment.
"Do you aspire to be a deacon? I respect your desires."
Flexibility... Addressing cases beyond the reach of Purifiers in various districts... I should typically have considerable freedom. How could there be so many significant matters... I don't know if Gandalf's apocalyptic prophecy holds true, but there's no harm in self-improvement... Angoulême pondered briefly and responded, "Your Eminence, thy will be done."
Plessy smiled and said, "As a deacon, you'll be tasked with selecting team members."
"Yes, Your Eminence." Angoulême extended his arms once more, praising the sun.
Upon returning to the underground confines of Église Saint-Robert, he summoned the mixed-blood Imre to his office, apprising his subordinate of the Trier diocese team.
"Are you willing to follow me?" Angoulême inquired.
Imre smiled and replied, "Does this mean I can advance my Sequence and earn a higher salary? I have no issue with that!"
After agreeing, the mixed-blood inquired, "Who should we choose next?"
Angoulême fell into silence for over ten seconds before stating, "Don't consider individuals like Valentine, those with a wife and children. Approach those who are single.
"A team under direct command is both an honor and a risk."
Angoulême released a soft sigh and added, "Which Purifier with a happy family wouldn't want to witness their child grow and spend more time with their spouse? Let the single individuals among us bear this burden."

Chapter 505: Departure

Having apprehended everyone deserving of it in the market district and putting those who hadn't been arrested on the wanted list, Angoulême found a rare moment of leisure. He shifted his focus to selecting members for the Trier diocese team.

Choosing from the Inquisition in the market district was impossible. Armed with information from Saint Vièvе Cathedral, he casually visited the Inquisition in Quartier de l'Observatoire, the prison district, and other locations where he engaged in detailed conversations with the target Purifiers.

He swiftly concluded his work and returned to his rented apartment in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, promptly falling asleep.

Angoulême slept until the early hours of the morning, awakened by the growling of his stomach. He nibbled on a piece of white bread, complemented by his stockpiled jerky, butter, and red wine.

Observing the unwashed cutlery on the coffee table, he contentedly seated himself in front of the miniaturized analyzer and switched on the radio transceiver.

During this time, the telegraph group was most active.

After sending a telegram to announce his presence, Angoulême pulled over a pillow, placing it behind him as he leaned comfortably against the wall.

Soon, amidst the clicking sounds, the analyzer, powered by numerous components, spat out a telegram.

Angoulême's forehead twitched at the sight of the telegram's signature: Hidden Blade.

He picked up the telegram and quickly scanned its contents.

"007, you're finally here. I have something to tell you!

"I've just received news that the Mirror People we mentioned have been infiltrating Trier over the past decade, replacing the original ones. Countless Trier citizens are already Mirror People, and no one knows their ultimate goals, but it can't be anything good.

"I'm investigating these Mirror People. I'll give you new clues at any moment. Keep an eye out for such matters in advance."

After reading it, Angoulême took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

...

The following morning, Lumian sat in a four-wheeled, four-seater rental carriage. Ludwig, clad in a caramel coat and carrying a red school bag, occupied the seat beside him. On the opposite side sat Lugano Toscano, with thick eyebrows and large eyes, emanating a distinct protagonist aura.

Glancing out the window at Avenue du Marché, Lumian noticed

little deviation from the usual scene.
Street vendors, public carriages, and rental carriages bustled about. The Suhit steam locomotive station welcomed numerous foreigners, waiters actively seeking customers, cafés doubling as beer houses, inexpensive restaurants, and card rooms, along with clerks and workers in a hurry.
While seemingly unchanged, subtle shifts had occurred. "Rat" Christo had fled, "Giant" Simon was apprehended, and Baron Brignais was nowhere to be found. He didn't even commission information brokers to seek out his smuggled godson.
The Savoie Mob, once dominant, faced total annihilation, setting the market district on the brink of new mob conflicts.
The dark-brown rental carriage, marked with a yellow plate, gradually departed from the lively and somewhat chaotic surroundings.
Observing Lumian divert his attention, Lugano inquired ingratiatingly,
"Should we travel by boat to Feynapotter, or perhaps get false identities and take the southbound steam locomotive to explore Riston Province first?"
He initially considered mentioning Cordu but refrained, sensing it might unsettle Lumian. Instead, he referred to their shared hometown, Riston Province, in a broader context.
"It's in the hands of fate," Lumian replied with a smile.
Producing three post-it notes, he scribbled various options with the black fountain pen he carried: "Boat," "steam locomotive," and "direct travel."
Crumpling the notes into balls, he deftly shuffled their positions, presenting a dazzling display of sleight of hand.
"Your turn. Let's see what fate has in store." Lumian extended his right hand to Lugano.
Isn't this too arbitrary? Lugano pondered, surprised by the randomness of selecting their travel method to the Feynapotter Kingdom through drawing lots. Despite the absurdity, he dutifully picked up a paper ball.
In any case, he had already received the 5,000 verl d'or advance payment!
Lugano unfolded the paper and read the word "ship."
Lumian nodded and smiled.
"Very good. Then let's take the steam locomotive."
"..." Lugano's expression became uncertain as he instinctively glanced at the wanted criminal worth 60,000 verl d'or sitting across from him. He wondered if Lumian was manipulating him to eliminate the wrong option or simply playing a prank.

Forcing another smile, Lugano suggested, "Shall we head back to the Suhit steam locomotive station?"
"No, to the Northern Train Station," Lumian replied, turning to Ludwig, who had been quietly eating without uttering a word.
Northern Train Station? Lugano felt increasingly puzzled by his employer's decision.
Trier had two main steam locomotive stations: Suhit, connecting the southern and central regions, and the Northern Train Station, responsible for the northern provinces. If their destination was the Feynapotter Kingdom and Riston Province, the logical choice would be Suhit. Why, then, were they going north?
Recognizing that it wasn't his place to question his employer's decisions, Lugano instructed the carriage driver to alter their course.
As noon approached, the rental carriage arrived at the Northern Trier Train Station.
I have to disguise myself and find a broker to fake my identity to buy a ticket... As Lugano directed the carriage driver to a more remote area, he turned to look at Lumian, preparing to make a suggestion.
He was met with an unfamiliar face.
The short flaxen-colored hair, brown eyes, and other facial features combined to create the appearance of a stranger.
If not for the silver earring on his right ear and the familiar clothes, Lugano might have believed they were ambushed by official Beyonders, having quietly dealt with Lumian.
"Purchase a ticket to Port Gati in Upper Coastal Province," Lumian calmly instructed.
Upper Coastal Province, Port Gati... Lugano suddenly grasped Lumian's strategy.
While his employer did intend to take a boat to the Feynapotter Kingdom, he chose a less obvious route. Instead of departing from the nearest Port LeSeur in Paz Province, he opted for Upper Coastal Province to the north.
For an ordinary person, it might seem wasteful, but for a wanted fugitive evading enemies, an unconventional approach could prove to be a prudent choice at avoiding potential dangers.
...
In the business carriage of the steam locomotive, divided into six cozy private rooms, Lumian's gaze swept across the slightly ajar carved wooden door, the table adorned with a vibrant, multi-colored tablecloth interwoven with golden threads, the plush sofa that doubled as a bed, and the slender wooden wall adorned with oil paintings. A satisfied nod escaped him.

A private room like this commanded a hefty price of 400 verl d'or, accommodating no more than four individuals.
The steam locomotive promised a 12-hour journey with an eight-hour night stop, totaling 20 hours. Travel costs were 30 verl d'or for a third-class seat, 45 verl d'or for second class, and 60 verl d'or for first class. The exclusive small private rooms in business class demanded 100 verl d'or per person, sold only in packages to maintain the privacy of business companions.
For a wanted fugitive like Lumian, this setup was perfect.
Equipped with the Lie earring and the Niese Face, Lumian had no real need for the privacy or luxury of the business carriage, but there was a compelling reason for his choice:
The business carriage provided two complimentary meals—dinner tonight and breakfast tomorrow.
A convenience that would spare Lumian from many hassles.
Sigh, a child has to eat something warm.
I just hope his appetite doesn't startle the attendants...
After catering to Ludwig for over two days, Lumian recognized the importance of his Traveler's Bag, capable of storing ample rations and desserts for long trips with the boy. The boy had to eat frequently!
Amidst the whistle, Lumian settled into his seat, absorbing the rhythmic clanging sounds as the scenery rapidly retreated on both sides.
In less than fifteen minutes, the colossal steam-spewing train departed from the bustling metropolis through the "cave door" carved into the high wall.
It left behind a metropolis pulsating with desires, immersed in both joy and pain.
Lumian half-closed his eyes, overhearing someone in the private room ahead sigh, as if reciting a poem.
"Goodbye, Trier!"
At 8 p.m., under the cover of complete darkness, the steam locomotive came to a halt at its scheduled stop—Dardel Station.
Situated on the outskirts of the Upper Coastal Province's Faust region, in Darder Town, the platform was already bustling with 20 to 30 men and women eagerly rushing to different carriages. Devoid of luggage, their faces radiated enthusiasm.
Knock! Knock! Knock! A middle-aged man, sporting thick black hair and a slightly hooked chin, rapped on the glass window corresponding to Lumian's private room.
With interest, Lumian pushed open the window and greeted with a smile, "What can I do for you?"
"Monsieur, would you like a drink? Perhaps a cozy bed instead of a

sofa?" the middle-aged man inquired in Intisian, his accent heavy.
"A bar with its own motel?" Lumian was enlightened.
It seemed like local merchants were soliciting customers right on the platform.
"That's right, that's right. Our bar boasts some charming little frogs," the middle-aged man winked suggestively.
"Little frogs?" Lugano, seated across from Lumian, asked, puzzled.
The middle-aged man pondered for a moment and explained, "That's our slang here in Coastal. It means the same as your Trier pussies."
In Trier, "pussies" often carried dual meanings, referring to both "female reproductive organs" and "prostitutes."
Is that so... Lumian had suspected as much but wasn't entirely certain.
Seated beside Lugano, Ludwig chimed in eagerly, "Anything good to eat?"
Without awaiting the middle-aged man's response, Lumian teased Ludwig with a smile, "I thought you were going to ask if the meat was tender or chewy and if it tasted good."
Initially unresponsive, Ludwig suddenly realized something and cursed, "Sick!"
Observing this, the middle-aged man swiftly introduced the local specialties.
Meanwhile, outside the station, dogs started barking in the town.
A lone bark triggered a chorus of canine voices, shattering the night's silence.
The middle-aged man's expression shifted, tainted with an indescribable sense of fear.

Chapter 506: Illness

Amidst the nighttime cacophony of the town's barking dogs, Lumian let out a low chuckle.

"Do you have that many dogs in Dardel?"

"Y-yes." The middle-aged man managed a hesitant smile.

Something is off as expected. Has something happened to this town? Lumian had intentionally inquired, keen on observing the reactions of the resident across from him.

Amidst the persisting dog chorus, he concentrated on gauging the other party's luck.

He had no plans to leave the steam locomotive and venture into Dardel for investigation. His only recourse was to probe into the luck of the town's residents, anticipating hidden problems before they could unexpectedly spread to the train station.

While Termiboros could influence his luck observation, there was always a chance of being misled. Lumian, lacking expertise in divination or prophecy, had limited options for gathering information without leaving the steam locomotive.

Factoring in various environmental details, he aimed to discern potential issues.

In Lumian's view, the middle-aged man's luck took on a ghastly green hue.

This indicated an impending illness—a rather peculiar one.

The specifics, such as when or what kind of illness, eluded Lumian's current Sequence.

Dog barking inducing fear, future special illness—do Dardel's wild dogs cause calamities by biting and spreading diseases? That's a plausible explanation, and it's not a Beyonder incident, but that means there's a potential solution. The man outside seems to be grappling with a hint of despair... Lumian turned to the middle-aged man who was soliciting customers and said, "Can you bring over the food we ordered?"

"We can do so if the meal cost exceeds two verl d'or. You know, it's not easy for us to enter the platform," the middle-aged man, now smiling again, replied.

At that moment, the clamor of dozens of dogs subsided, no longer as intense as before.

"No problem," Lumian casually ordered a variety of dishes—apple liqueur, deep-fried potato pancakes, shrimp in gravy, Dardel meat sauce, stewed pork, saltmarsh mutton, buttered pancakes, and wick cheese. The total cost amounted to 10 verl d'or.

Ludwig couldn't help but gulp with each mention of a dish.

Four hours prior, an attendant had delivered a four-person

standard dinner. Despite managing to finish two portions alone, Ludwig remained unsatisfied. He had also retrieved multiple pieces of jerky from Lumian's Traveler's Bag.
Two hours ago, he had his first supper, consisting of cheese, dessert, bread, jerky, and more.
Now, he was hungry again.
The middle-aged man, who had used simple words and symbols to record the dish names, couldn't resist asking,
"Is the food provided in a carriage of this level not tasty?"
Otherwise, why would Ludwig look as though he hadn't eaten dinner?
Lumian responded in turn, "That's right. Don't ever expect to eat tasty food on a steam locomotive."
After noting down the dish names and receiving 5 verl d'or banknotes as a down payment, the middle-aged man with a slightly hooked chin moved to another private room.
"Wait," Lumian suddenly called out.
"Is there anything else, Monsieur?" the middle-aged man turned around and inquired.
Lumian smiled and said, "You don't look well. If you don't want to get sick, you need more rest in the next few days."
The middle-aged man froze, his expression struck by lightning.
After a momentary pause, panic and fear mixed on his face.
"A-alright. Thank you." He turned around in a hurry and dashed out of the platform, forgetting to solicit other customers.
Dardel's abnormality is indeed linked to illnesses... Lumian mused as he withdrew his gaze thoughtfully.
Lugano asked with curiosity, "Why can't I tell that he's sub-healthy and could fall ill at any moment?"
Being a Doctor, he possessed corresponding abilities. Even without activating his Spirit Vision, he could discern various external manifestations of a person's body.
Recognizing a concealed illness and with Lumian's warning, he activated his Spirit Vision to observe the person's Ether Body.
"Sub-healthy" was a term coined by Emperor Roselle, but it had only gained popularity in Intis's medical world in recent years.
He's not currently in a sub-healthy state, but it's very likely that he will contract a special illness... Lumian used Lugano's questions to confirm that the townsfolk's illness didn't originate from him.
He smiled and responded to Lugano's question, "It's never wrong to care about others' health and encourage them to rest more."
Instinctively, Lugano revealed an expression that said, "I don't buy it." Then, he masked it with a smile.
"He seems to share that concern."

"That's right," Lumian replied patronizingly.
Dardel's barking subsided and resounded at times. Sometimes, it was just outside the platform, and at other times, it came from the edge of the town. Lumian listened quietly and sighed inwardly.
Why am I encountering something like this again?
Do I bring calamity, or does calamity lure me here?
From the looks of it, the problem in Dardel has been around for a while. It has nothing to do with my arrival... No matter how I avoid it or make choices via the use of others, I'll always be drawn to calamities and unknowingly approach them...
Is this why a Hunter with an angelic level and the Blood Emperor's remnant aura will inevitably encounter an abnormal situation despite their low Sequence?
In the future, will a novelist write about my experiences like Gehrman Sparrow's? Then, the line "he's always accompanied by calamity" would be included.
As time ticked by, the middle-aged man who had been soliciting customers arrived with a bar waiter, each carrying a food container.
"Is this what you want?" He and the waiter handed plates and glasses through the window.
Seeing the table covered in an exquisite tablecloth filled with tempting food, Lumian took a sip of the slightly sour apple liqueur and paid the remaining 5 verl d'or for the meal.
"We'll collect the cutlery in an hour. We won't be disturbing you, will we?" the middle-aged man asked politely.
Lumian nodded, giving them permission.
After sidestepping with the waiter for a moment, the middle-aged man found himself returning to his original position. He couldn't resist the urge to inquire,
"Monsieur, how do you know I'm about to fall ill?"
Lumian, gesturing towards Lugano across the way, explained, "My friend is a renowned doctor in Trier."
The term "renowned" here applied to a wanted poster.
Without awaiting the middle-aged man's reply, Lumian casually inquired, "What's your name?"
"Just call me Pierre," the middle-aged man replied, hunched over as he observed Lumian in the snug private room on the steam locomotive.
Do you folks fancy that name around here too? Lumian grinned and asked, "Do you think you'll get sick too?"
Pierre's eyelids twitched, his expression momentarily freezing.
Instinctively, he replied, "No, no. Just a bit concerned."
"Well then, get some rest, drink more water, and perhaps seek out

the clergyman at the cathedral for repentance," Lumian advised without pressing further.
Pierre moved towards the front of the locomotive in silence, hoping to drum up more business. However, his steps seemed burdened, as if his feet were encased in lead, each stride a struggle.
"Woof, woof, woof!"
The barking resumed near the platform.
Pierre's face contorted, overwhelmed with worry and fear. Suddenly, he turned around, shaking off the waiter and rushing to the window of the small private room where Lumian and the others were situated.
"Save me, Doctor, save me!" he pleaded, pressing his hands against the glass with a desperate expression.
Lumian seized the moment, stating, "Unless you disclose the cause of the illness, my friend won't be able to treat you."
The commotion reached the passengers in the adjacent private rooms, but in their slumber, they were indifferent to the unfolding drama.
Pierre swallowed hard, stealing a glance at the equally terrified bar waiter.
"Yes, yes..."
Before he could complete his sentence, a figure materialized on the platform's wall.
The figure stood firmly, legs apart, body contorted, but its head tilted upward, fixated on some distant point.
It was a man, clad in tweed garments, conspicuously marked by tears and frays. His facial muscles contorted dramatically, and his eyes were rolled back, leaving only a white patch visible.
Saliva dribbled from his open mouth as he attempted to speak.
"Woof! Woof! Woof!"
The barking harmonized with the other canine sounds in Dardel, forming a disconcerting chorus.
"It's Derangement!" Pierre finally exclaimed.
"Derangement?" Lumian shifted his attention from the man barking on the wall to Lugano.
Lugano observed the abnormality for a moment before slowly shaking his head at Lumian.
His message was clear: this wasn't your typical case of rabies.
Pierre, mistakenly thinking Lumian was addressing him, was on the brink of emotional collapse.
"Yes, Derangement!
"I don't know when it started. People in our town began turning into barking lunatics. Initially, it was just one, but then two, three,

ten... Many acquaintances of mine got infected, completely losing their minds. They only bark like dogs and are most active during the night!"
"Did they contract it from being bitten by these lunatics?" Lugano inquired with a furrowed brow.
"No, the ones I know weren't bitten, but they still went mad! I-I feel like I'm soon next!" Pierre exclaimed in despair.
"You didn't seek help from the government?" Lumian was puzzled, thinking that official Beyonders wouldn't allow such a situation to escalate.
"We heard about a village having a similar situation as Derangement; they reported it to the government, and then the whole village vanished. We... we didn't dare approach either the government or the Church!" Pierre explained frantically, with the bar waiter by his side equally terrified.
Lumian's eyes narrowed.
"Where are the people from the town's health department, police station, and the cathedral's padre?"
"They were the first to succumb to madness." Pierre, caught up in distress, didn't consider Lumian's intentions in asking.
The initial casualties were the padre, police, and health officials... Lumian raised an eyebrow and remarked, "So why haven't you tried escaping from Dardel?"
"Escape..." Pierre and the bar waiter were startled, staring blankly at Lumian.
Beneath the crimson moonlight, the whites of their eyes took on a bloodshot hue.

Chapter 507: Dead End

Pierre and the bar waiter locked eyes with Lumian and the others, their bloodshot gaze shifting from vacant to sheer terror.

In hushed tones, they uttered frantically, "You folks are aware... You folks are aware that there's Derangement here..."

Abruptly, Pierre's face contorted, and he bellowed in hysteria, "None of you can leave!

"Once the outsiders catch wind of this, we're all done for!"

He swiftly maneuvered through the steam locomotive's open window, attempting to climb in and forcefully pull Lumian and the others out.

In response, Lugano rose to his feet, delivering a powerful blow with his right fist.

With a resounding thud, Pierre slumped, unconscious, hanging awkwardly from the window. The bar waiter, seemingly unhinged, trampled over the fallen man, attempting to leap into the carriage.

Lugano struck again, his punch rendering the bloodshot-eyed bar waiter unconscious. He slumped over Pierre, creating an unusual tableau.

They didn't abnormally transform into monsters... Lumian had previously speculated that the two town folks had succumbed suddenly to Derangement.

Turning to Lumian, Lugano inquired in a low voice, "What do we do?"

"What do we do?" Lumian echoed the Doctor's inquiry.

The unfolding events not only displayed an abnormality but also left him with a sense of inner conflict and displacement.

The peculiar Derangement, causing people to lose their sanity and transform into canine-like creatures, coupled with the consecutive onset of various illnesses, unmistakably hinted at supernatural forces at play. However, the mystery deepened as Pierre and the other townsfolk, who were evidently concerned about keeping Derangement a secret, freely disclosed the information to Lumian.

This apparent contradiction could be attributed to Pierre's overwhelming mental stress, pushed to the brink. Lumian's mention of future sickness served as the tipping point, prompting Pierre to instinctively guard the secret from leaking when reminded.

Yet, the lingering question persisted: *Why not escape?*

Faced with an infectious and unstoppable Derangement, wouldn't it be prudent for ordinary humans to flee Dardel and return once the plague had subsided?

Even if they feared attracting attention from the authorities by fleeing, a temporary escape into the nearby mountains after addressing those potentially afflicted could provide a solution.
Unless there was some force preventing the citizens of Dardel from escaping!
Lumian deduced this from various details.
The townsfolk were cognizant of similar Derangement cases elsewhere, resulting in entire villages being wiped out by the authorities. Normally, such incidents would be reported as a tragic disaster with everyone buried.
After the initial infection, key figures like the cathedral's clergyman, the police, and health department officials succumbed to madness, severing Dardel's connection with regional authorities from the start.
It appeared as if an intelligent and dangerous individual deliberately spread Derangement, employing tactics to hinder the townsfolk from escaping.
Why would this mastermind allow Pierre and others to divulge the situation to the Doctor on the steam locomotive?
If the steam train were to stay in Dardel, unable to reach Port Gati by the next morning, it would undoubtedly attract official Beyonder investigation.
Lumian, thinking from the mastermind's perspective, considered it illogical to choose a transportation hub regularly frequented by steam locomotives. Even without Lumian's inquiries, those choosing to enter Dardel to sleep under a warm blanket and sample beautiful frogs would eventually notice the abnormality, raising suspicions. They couldn't all be made to stay behind, could they? This would lead to an investigation!
There are many contradictions, inconsistencies, and inexplicable aspects... He's smart yet foolish, cautious yet careless... Lumian, contemplating the intricacies, turned to Lugano and said, "What else can we do? Of course, we have to find a way to inform the authorities about this. Don't tell me you want to investigate the source of the Derangement and save the residents here, do you? I didn't expect you to be so noble."
Lugano smiled awkwardly. The latter possibility had never crossed his mind.
"How should we inform the authorities?" he asked sincerely, admitting his lack of experience in such matters.
"The simplest solution is to get the train police here and tell them what Pierre said. Have them use the train's radio to contact the relevant departments in the Faust area or the Upper Coastal Province," Lumian suggested casually.

However, Lugano hesitated, expressing concern, "B-but as witnesses, we'll be invited to assist in the investigation. O-our identities are fake, and even if we use your mystical item to change our appearances, it's easy to expose that we're Beyonders under the influence of some mysticism abilities."
Lumian pondered for a moment and offered an alternative with a smile, "Then find an empty room on the platform, pile dozens of bundles of explosives, and detonate them. The explosion will send the roof flying, destroying the house. This way, the conductor and the train police will report it quickly, and the officials in the Faust area will take notice. When they investigate further, they'll discover the hidden problem in Dardel. How about that? We won't need to personally show our faces in this plan, right?"
Lugano considered the proposal but raised another concern, "When the authorities investigate further, they'll discover that we've interacted with Dardel's residents. They'll worry that we might also be in danger of contracting Derangement. When the time comes, we won't be able to pass the scrutiny."
Lumian felt a twinge of frustration, recalling how he and his sister had been trapped in Cordu after the abnormality. Everything they did had its cons.
He chuckled and said, "Then investigate the source of the Derangement personally and blast it into pieces!
"This will completely resolve the problem without attracting the officials' attention!"
Ludwig, who had consumed countless suppers, swallowed the deep-fried potato pie in his mouth and calmly said, "After informing the authorities about Derangement, why stay here and wait for them to investigate?
"Can't we just leave, change our identities, and take another steam locomotive to another port?"
Uh... Lumian was taken aback.
Why hadn't I thought of such a simple idea?
Just now, the more Lugano and I discussed, the deeper we delved into a dead end. We were entirely focused on finding a reason and excuse for entering Dardel to investigate the source of the Derangement...
A realization hit Lumian, and his heart skipped a beat.
Nonchalantly, he gazed at Lugano, assessing the Doctor's luck.
The other party's luck in the future would also be tainted with a ghastly green!
With a smile, Lumian said to Lugano, "You also have the possibility of contracting Derangement."
Lugano was taken aback for a moment before asking with a pale

face, "Really?"
"Think of it as a joke," Lumian turned his head, seemingly relaxed, and said to Ludwig, "See, there are many benefits to studying more. In the past, you wouldn't have thought of such a solution and only knew nothing but eating."
Ignoring the Hunter, Ludwig forked a piece of mutton into his mouth.
"What should I do? What should I do..." Lugano muttered to himself, attempting to use his Doctor powers on himself to see if he could be saved.
Lumian interrupted him.
"No rush. There's just a risk of contracting the illness. You just need to leave this place before you get truly infected."
As he spoke, he stood up and walked out of the private room.
"W-where are you going?" Lugano blurted out.
Lumian slipped his hands into his pockets and responded with a smile. "Inform the authorities about Derangement."
Lugano was momentarily at a loss for words and expressions. All he could do was watch in a daze as Lumian strolled out of the private room.
Reaching the train's washroom, Lumian locked the door and activated the black mark representing Spirit World Traversal.
His figure swiftly vanished, reappearing in Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative in Trier.
Neither Franca nor Jenna was asleep at this hour. One was engrossed in a novel, while the other contemplated what knowledge to impart to Rabbit Chasel.
"W-why are you back?" Franca jumped in fright.
She had the illusion that she had just dropped him off at school in the morning and found him at home, legs up, eating snacks, and watching television in the afternoon.
Lumian glanced at Franca and smiled. "We encountered a Beyonder incident and wish to inform the authorities through your channels to have them resolve it."
Franca exclaimed in surprise and amusement, "Y-you encountered another Beyonder incident? What a mysticism catastrophe detector!?"
Jenna looked at Lumian and suddenly felt that it was a good thing for him to leave Trier.
"I didn't want to either." Lumian spread his hands sincerely.
Franca exhaled and said, "Where is it? What kind of incident?"
"In Dardel in Upper Coastal Province's Faust region..." Lumian briefly recounted the situation.
Franca and Jenna were both surprised and terrified by the

contagious Derangement.
Simultaneously, Franca muttered inwardly, I wonder how 007 will react to this "surprise"...
He's always telling me to get out of the market district. If I really do, he'll realize that not only will Beyonder cases in Trier's other districts pile up on him, the mystical catastrophes of Intis's other provinces will also descend upon him...
Ah, that's right. *What does it have to do with me?* It's all Lumian's fault!
Thankfully, this fellow is heading to the Feynapotter Kingdom in the future. No matter what Beyonder incidents he encounters, it's no longer 007's problem. He can't possibly collaborate across borders...
After explaining the situation in Dardel, Lumian didn't linger. He "teleported" back to the washroom of the steam locomotive's business carriage.
He turned on the tap and washed his hands without hesitation. Then, he left the washroom and returned to the small private room. He said to Lugano, "The authorities will react soon. Let's prepare to leave."
Lugano sprang to his feet.
At that moment, the unconscious Pierre slowly regained consciousness, shaking the bar waiter off his body and landing on the platform.
Lumian looked at him and smiled.
"We'll stay and investigate the source of Derangement. Can you tell me who patient zero was?"
"Who was it..." Pierre didn't lose his mind and attack Lumian and the others like before. Instead, he fell into deep thought.

Chapter 508: Patient Zero

Lugano, who had been listening, shot Lumian a puzzled glance. He couldn't fathom why Lumian would strike up a casual conversation with Pierre just as they were on the verge of departing.

A few more moments, and the official Beyonders would make their entrance!

Besides, delving too deep into this matter could invite trouble down the road. They might end up under scrutiny, or worse, attract the attention of the Derangement's source, prompting immediate intervention!

Pierre pondered for more than ten seconds before uttering with uncertainty, "Patient Zero seemed to be a guest renting a room at our bar..."

"Foreigner?" Lumian inquired with composure.

Having already briefed the official Beyonders about the Derangement through Franca and resolved to find an opportunity to "teleport" away later, Lumian was no longer as tense as before. Thus, before leaving, he aimed to unravel more about Derangement and construct a plausible explanation for the inconsistencies.

This quest for information, problem analysis, and uncovering of clues and answers was all part of a Conspirer's acting. With some idle time on his hands, Lumian seized the chance to digest some of the potion.

Lumian wasn't overly concerned about the potential repercussions of being privy to this situation.

Could the information on Derangement hold a candle to 0-01's sealed intel?

Moreover, as long as he didn't go berserk on the spot, he could later seek assistance from his superior to explore potential solutions!

Pierre contemplated for a few seconds, his expression reflecting confusion, and then he said, "Probably... I can't recall her name, and I have no idea where she came from. All I remember is that she suddenly lost her mind and dashed from the motel upstairs to the bar. She tried to bite people and barked like a dog."

The infected foreigner spreading Derangement to Dardel? Then why were the townsfolk displaying no inclination to escape this place? Is this also a manifestation of Derangement? Lumian asked thoughtfully, "Did she manage to bite anyone? What happened to her?"

"We took care of her before she could sink her teeth into anyone. We apprehended her and handed her over to the health

department," Pierre recollected.
Sent to the health department? Lumian nodded slowly.
"Did the next person to succumb to madness come from the health department?"
"Yes, exactly!" Pierre affirmed this time.
Lumian pondered for a moment and inquired, "What did the resident look like?"
"A young woman. Her face was a bit pale, and her eyes were vacant. I-I can't recall her appearance..." Pierre couldn't help but raise his palm and rub his head.
Upon hearing this, Lumian's heart stirred.
If the root of all the abnormalities in Dardel indeed stemmed from a deranged individual, many contradictions could find an explanation!
Patient Zero was already in a state of madness; instinctively, she would spread Derangement to those around her in a supernatural sense, regardless of whether it was an isolated village or a bustling town serving as a transportation hub.
Simultaneously, she would subconsciously employ her ability to disseminate the supernatural Derangement, dropping hints to the townsfolk that leaving wasn't an option. She would control all channels that might carry the news. However, due to her madness and lack of thorough consideration, she didn't explicitly order the townsfolk not to discuss Derangement with the steam locomotive passengers.
Certainly, it wasn't necessarily due to a lack of thorough consideration. Lumian believed it was more plausible that the lunatic's instincts desired to involve more people and infect them with Derangement. Consequently, people who were aware of this weren't permitted to leave or seek help from the authorities. On the other hand, the prohibition didn't prevent residents from discussing Derangement with passersby.
This was a limited and relatively safe method of contagion. Passengers who knew about Derangement were akin to approaching the source of the plague. For instance, Lugano's luck had turned, increasing the probability of contracting the disease. Lumian and he had forgotten the option of escaping. The more they communicated, the more desperate they became, ultimately reaching a dead end. They were resolute in entering Dardel to investigate.
This was a precursor to becoming infected with Derangement. Unbeknownst to them, they had inadvertently received a mental cue.
With this in mind, Lumian suspected that the young woman

might be a survivor of the village that had previously been eradicated, a potential carrier who had escaped the authorities' purge.
She had intertwined these memories with Derangement and disseminated them. That was how the residents of Dardel learned about a similar plague in a village wiped out by the authorities.
Typically, they lacked the qualifications or means to know such things!
Having formulated this preliminary hypothesis, Lumian smiled and turned to Pierre and the bar waiter, asking, "Where is the village you mentioned that was destroyed by the authorities because of Derangement?"
"I-I think it's somewhere in the Haut-Hornacis Province..." Pierre recalled the rumors he had heard.
Haut-Hornacis Province... That's quite a distance from Upper Coastal Province. Moreover, there's no direct steam locomotive; it requires a transfer through a few provinces in the West Midseashire Coast or Trier. How could you folks, who rarely leave Dardel, have heard such a rumor? Did a bard or passenger from Haut-Hornacis Province pass by this transportation hub? The more Lumian pondered, the more he leaned toward his hypothesis.
He refrained from pressing further and probed Pierre, "This Derangement holds significant research value. We'll venture into Dardel to investigate its source and try to find a cure.
"However, preparations will take some time. Moreover, it's nighttime.
"At dawn, we will step into Dardel. We won't depart until we resolve the problem."
Lumian stressed the phrases "will enter Dardel" and "will not leave for the time being" to gauge Pierre and the bar waiter's reactions.
Their expressions underwent several changes, and they were no longer as hysterical as before.
After a few moments, Pierre implored, "You must come to town tomorrow!"
"No problem," Lumian replied with a reassuring smile.
He was now even more convinced that this was an instinctive infection and influence. There was no structured approach to handling the alterations. As long as he avoided triggering a crucial matter or even took the initiative to broach the topic of cooperation, he could effectively deceive the source of Derangement.
Observing Pierre and the bar waiter about to move toward the other windows of the steam locomotive, Lumian called out to them, "Wait a moment."

After the two of them turned in surprise, Lumian gestured towards the table between the two sofas.
"You can take the cutlery away now."
Pierre and the bar waiter glanced at the dining table in confusion, realizing that only remnants were left on the empty plates.
Had they finished eating already? The delivery men hadn't even departed yet!
Pierre and the bar waiter were aware that they had spent a considerable amount of time discussing the Derangement issue, but it still felt surreal.
Won't they eating too quickly?
Was he feeding three lions?
Burp... Ludwig wiped his mouth with a tablecloth, a content expression on his face.
After the two townsfolk cleared away the cutlery, gathered their food boxes, and departed from the platform, Lumian smiled at Lugano and remarked, "Continue watching. Chill."
I can't chill. How are we to escape when the official Beyonders arrive? Lugano's heart felt like it was being grilled.
Observing his reaction, Lumian muttered silently, He's indeed acting like a wild Beyonder with a low Sequence and little knowledge... He doesn't show anything special like Ludwig... Is he really an ordinary wild Beyonder who only accepted a mission to follow me?
Simultaneously, Lumian focused his attention and checked Lugano's luck. He realized that the ghastly green traces had vanished, and there was no grisly calamity in store.
This meant that the Doctor no longer had the potential to contract Derangement, and he likely wouldn't be embroiled in the officials' operations to deal with Dardel's abnormality later.
After a while, Lumian heard a loud noise and saw the night suddenly brighten outside.
Light streamed down from midair.
Lumian looked up and noticed two colossal objects floating in the night.
They were two airships clad in dark gray paint, frantically spinning their paddles.
They were much smaller than the one Lumian had seen in Trier.
The condensed light shone from their front and lower positions, converging on the edge of Dardel.
Simultaneously, the town erupted in a cacophony of barking once more, as if movement was taking place everywhere.
The officials from the Faust region are here? Lumian averted his gaze, awaiting the outcome.

Shouts, cries, gunshots, and various beams of sunlight continued for nearly an hour before completely subsiding.
Before long, a team of police officers entered the private room, questioning the now disguised, fake identification-wielding Lumian and company's interactions with Dardel's residents.
Other than anything related to Derangement, Lumian told them everything honestly.
He was ready to "teleport" away with Ludwig and Lugano at any moment.
After recording and comparing tickets and identification, the police officers left the carriage.
Lumian patiently waited until dawn. The police officers returned, presenting three contracts and requesting their signatures.
The contract explained that the disturbance from the previous night had resulted from a special military operation, and everyone was obligated to keep it confidential.
Does what I revealed before my signature count? Lumian chuckled inwardly and calmly signed with an alias.
His fake identity had just been activated, and it had minimal mystic connections.
After the police departed, Lumian, having intentionally gone through the official process firsthand, intended to grasp Lugano and Ludwig's shoulders and "teleport" away.
Uncertain if the contract signed with an alias would be discovered, he aimed to avoid potential risks.
At that moment, Lumian noticed a towering figure behind Lugano.
It was his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, draped in a dark clergyman's robe and surrounded by charred flames.
Baynfel sent a folded letter drifting towards Lumian.
Lugano was taken aback to see a piece of paper materialize. He instinctively glanced behind him, but Lumian opened the letter and perused its contents.
"Based on the feedback I received, this should be the escape of a Sealed Artifact.
"That Sealed Artifact resembles a young woman. It first surfaced during a catastrophe in Haut-Hornacis Province. Most of the time, she remains in her normal state, appearing lifeless, pale, and muddle-headed. However, once she enters a state of madness, she gradually infects the surrounding people with the same Derangement as her. There's no definite transmission pattern.
"She might not be in the same state every time she goes mad. The same goes for her Derangement symptoms.
"In her normal state, although she's like an unintelligent ghost and acts on instinct, she possesses a power akin to the power of

speech, where whatever she says comes true, and if she declares someone dead, they will die..."

Also possesses the ability to turn spoken words into reality... Before the Derangement took hold, she acted on instinct, her pale face and lifeless eyes mirroring the description of Patient Zero by Pierre. Lumian delved into the catastrophe's details through Franca's letter, gaining a deeper understanding.
His speculations, rooted in Pierre's answers and behavior, aligned closely with the truth.
The divergence lay in Lumian's belief that the initial infected individual was a genuine lunatic that acted on instinct, while official information identified her as a humanoid Sealed Artifact, still governed by instinct, that lacked intelligence whether in her normal state or deranged state.
Lumian's speculations, however, didn't rule out the possibility that the young woman had transformed into a true lunatic—one that instinctively spread Derangement—due to some form of corruption, necessitating her sealing.
As for why it was a seal and not a direct eradication, Lumian could roughly guess the reason.
The ability to kill anyone at will was still coveted, despite various restrictions. The power to eliminate anyone at will remained highly sought after, despite certain constraints. Whether it was the Inquisition, the Machinery Hivemind, or Bureau 8, they all prioritized sealing over destruction if a viable method existed. Lumian knew they might even depend on her to handle future crises.
His eyes moved down the letter's contents, absorbing the information.
"As for additional details, confidentiality prevents the source from providing more."
"Keep a vigilant eye on individuals like her. If you uncover anything suspicious, immediately distance yourself and report it to the authorities."
No specifics about her origins, the sealing technique, the manifestation of speech, or how to counteract Derangement were provided. No concrete seal level or number... Despite Dardel's abnormality and prior descriptions, even if it isn't a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, it holds significant and terrifying properties among Grade 2 Sealed Artifacts... Lumian pondered briefly, then stowed the letter in his Traveler's Bag without incinerating it on the spot.
At that moment, Lugano was observing his back in bewilderment.
Despite activating his Spirit Vision, he found nothing.
Lumian's messenger, Penitent Baynfel, had long departed.

"Let's go," Lumian sighed, reaching out to grasp Ludwig and Lugano's shoulders.
His foremost regret was the wasted third of the 400 verl d'or fare.
He still needed to source different cafés for Ludwig's breakfast; he couldn't allow him to be satiated from one place to avoid raising suspicion.
In the next instant, Lugano felt as if he had crossed into the spirit world he'd just glimpsed. Instead of being a mere observer, he plunged deeper into layers of saturated colors, bathing in the light of seven different-colored brilliances overhead. Surrounded by indescribable faces and figures, he "sped" toward an unknown destination.
Dizziness overcame him, but in just over ten seconds, his feet met solid ground. Buildings in beige, brownish-red, and light yellow surrounded him.
Lumian hadn't "teleported" too far and chose Faust, with Dardel falling under its jurisdiction.
Under the dawn's light, Lumian adorned the Lie earring and retrieved a tweed coat from his Traveler's Bag, seamlessly altering his appearance, height, and attire in a secluded alley.
In less than a minute, he morphed into an entirely different person.
Though not the first time Lugano had witnessed this, he couldn't help but be slightly shocked by the scene.
What a mystical item and formidable ability!
Whether it was the silver earring allowing one to adjust appearance within a certain range or the coin bag with seemingly infinite capacity, Lugano had never seen anything like it. Occasionally, he'd heard other bounty hunters speak of official Beyonders possessing Beyonder-level disguises.
Lumian tossed the Lie earring to Lugano, casually stating, "Get three more sets of fake identities and buy steam locomotive tickets that will arrive in Port Gati today."
Am I a translator, guide, or your attendant? Lugano criticized as he caught the mystical silver earring.
He forced a smile and said, "I've never been to the Faust area, so I don't know who to find for fake identities."
"The principles are common. I trust your experience," Lumian replied with a smile.
Alright, since you're paying... Lugano muttered silently, retrieving a change of clothes from his suitcase.
At the Northern Trier Train Station, Lumian had already paid him 1,000 verl d'or for the fake identities and informed him that he would handle similar expenses in the future.

After Ludwig put on the Lie earring, Lugano left the alley with his suitcase.
Lumian activated the Niese Face, altering his appearance once more, and trailed Lugano from afar while holding Ludwig, who was adjusting his height and appearance.
He wanted to observe the Doctor's actions and reactions in an unfamiliar place to uncover potential issues.
To prevent Ludwig from protesting, Lumian held down his wide-brimmed hat and tossed him a few loaves of baguettes.
Ludwig, not clamoring for a hot meal, obediently nibbled on the food as Lumian pulled him along.
In the early morning, the bars were closed, so Lugano headed to the nearest market and approached a prowler suspected to be a mobster. Using money, he bought access and discovered where to obtain fake identities.
Throughout the process, Lugano appeared no different from an ordinary bounty hunter.
Lumian wasn't disappointed or displeased. He calmly followed Lugano until he secured a differently scheduled steam locomotive. Only then did he dispel the Niese Face and rendezvous with his companion.
...
In Port Gati, Upper Coastal Province, Lumian occupied a luxurious hotel room near the sea.
Standing before the expansive glass window, he observed the azure sky, seemingly washed in water, contrasting with the clear and pure sea below, resembling gems.
The clear and melodious calls of gurgling seabirds, accompanied by their graceful figures, traversed between white clouds, white beaches, and ship masts. Even without opening the window, Lumian could intuitively feel the refreshing sea breeze from the sea.
This port, a main entry point for products from industrial cities in the West Midseashire Coast into the Fog Sea, was famous for trade and shipbuilding, boasting prosperity.
Contrary to Trieriens' beliefs about scarce sunlight in the north, Port Gati remained perpetually bathed in sunlight, with autumn maintaining a mild temperature.
As Ludwig chewed, Lumian admired the seascape and distant harbor, awaiting Lugano's return with tickets to the Feynapotter Kingdom's Port Santa.
At that moment, Penitent Baynfel, abnormally tall and clad in a black clergyman's robe, emerged from the void, silently handing Lumian a letter.

"Thank you," Lumian acknowledged out of habit before taking the letter and unfolding it.
"Dardel's Derangement has been contained. They've eliminated the severely infected residents, treated the slightly infected, but the Sealed Artifact is nowhere to be found.
"According to the information gathered at the scene, it appears she returned to normal a few days ago and left Dardel. Her current whereabouts are unknown. The spreading Derangement resulted from the severely corrupted sea of minds.
"The townsfolk's abnormal behavior—unwilling to leave Dardel yet keen on informing passersby about Derangement—likely stems from the corrupted sea of minds. Anthony's recently learned terminology describes it as a sea of collective subconscious forming a mind world with the island of consciousness and the spirituality sky.
"Be cautious in the future; there's a risk of being drawn to another mystical catastrophe caused by the Sealed Artifact."
They didn't catch the Sealed Artifact... Lumian clicked his tongue, sensing a brewing headache.
Honestly, there was nothing he could do. Upon arriving in Dardel, the other party had already departed, leaving the catastrophe still unfolding.
At 3 p.m., Lumian, accompanied by Lugano and Ludwig, boarded the Flying Bird, a merchant ship bound for the Feynapotter Kingdom's Port Santa.
Opting for a first-class cabin, they secured a suite featuring a master bedroom, a child's room, a servant's quarters, a living room, and a washroom. With specialized attendants at their service, they gained access to the most upscale dining room and the exclusive cigar room. The cost, a hefty 700 verl d'or, was nearly equivalent to Charlie's annual income as a hotel attendant.
Money was something Lumian cared about, yet not too much. Past experiences and his sister's guidance had made him instinctively calculative, but the relatively "easy" acquisition of money, like the 30,000 verl d'or he obtained from the safe at Salle de Bal Brise, lessened the sting.
Besides, he already possessed the potion formula, main ingredients, and supplementary ingredients for his next Sequence, eliminating the immediate need for accumulating funds.
As a devoted reader of The Adventurer series, Lumian knew of the numerous human-shaped treasures at sea. If he needed money, he was willing to imitate his idol and cull them.
The Flying Bird, the latest steam-powered ship, was entirely made of steel, with no sails but smokestacks emitting fog and masts

with watchtowers.
Iron-gray with intertwining red and gold colors, the ship boasted a wide deck, numerous gun emplacements, and surpassed classic sailboats in displacement, passenger capacity, speed, and sturdiness. When compared to those backward-era fellows, it was like an adult looking down on children.
Before the Cordu incident, Lumian had considered embarking on a maritime journey, inspired by the adventurer Gehrman Sparrow, to entice his sister. However, Aurore had deferred this plan until after his university graduation.
In the spacious, brightly lit living room of the first-class cabin, Lumian gazed out the window at the azure sea, lost in thought.
Ooo!
Amidst the whistle, mist billowed from the chimneys of the Flying Bird.
The massive iron-armored merchant ship slowly departed Port Gati, accompanied by the symphony of various machinery starting to operate, heading into the depths of the sea.
Squawk! Squawk! The cries of seabirds reverberated through the clouds.

Chapter 510: First Day at Sea

Amidst the billowing smoke, the Flying Bird cut through the Fog Sea, heading west towards the Intis colony in the Fog Sea Archipelago. They were the same islands in the saying, "never trust an Islander." From there, it would journey south to Port Santa, northwest of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

Though the Fog Sea was notorious for its heavy fog, the offshore areas were less affected. Lumian spent the next three hours under the bright sun, immersed in a book—an introductory textbook for the Feynapotter Kingdom's Highlander language. While he had Lugano, his translator and guide, Lumian didn't want to be completely reliant on him for information and communication. If anything happened to Lugano, or if he were to deliberately manipulate translations, Lumian would be vulnerable.

Mastering some basic Highlander phrases before reaching Port Santa would allow Lumian to verify the accuracy of translations and give him some independence.

Typically, learning Highlander in less than ten days was nearly impossible for Beyonders not from the Reader pathway. However, Lumian had a significant advantage: his knowledge of ancient Feysac, the original language from which Highlander evolved. The two languages shared many similarities in sentence structure, meaning, grammar, and word structure, allowing Lumian to learn Highlander much faster.

"When can dinner be delivered?" Ludwig paced restlessly in front of Lumian's recliner, frustrated that the exclusive attendant hadn't yet arrived with dinner, despite the darkening sky.

Lumian closed his book as the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows illuminated by the kerosene lamp. With a chuckle, he said, "Blame yourself for ordering so much. They need time to cook it all. Thankfully, the first-class cabin has an independent kitchen, otherwise they'd be overwhelmed..."

Before he could finish, the doorbell rang.

As the chimes reverberated, Lugano opened the thick vermilion door to find the young attendant pushing a dining cart into the room, its surface covered in a thick yellowish-brown carpet.

Under Ludwig's eager gaze, the attendant calmly laid out the tablecloth and utensils.

"This is a local delicacy, Gati herring. It involves marinating smoked soft herring filets, onions, and carrot slices in olive oil, thyme, bay leaves, and other spices for 24 to 48 hours. It's perfect with warm potato salad."

"And these are deep-fried fries. In Upper Coastal Province, there's a

saying: without fries, there's no heaven...
"There's also raisin cream bread...
"These are fresh oysters and shellfish...
"This is Faust turkey, ham and mushroom burrito. This is Umu's duck minced meat and coarse brown sugar vanilla waffle...
"This is traditional orange cheese... and there's also a pungent gray cheese. Would you like to give it a try?
"This is Upper Coastal Province's favorite apple cider[1]..."
Lumian listened with genuine interest as the attendant described each dish. He noticed that, despite his impatience, Ludwig didn't immediately attack his food. Instead, he waited patiently until the attendant finished before sampling the pre-meal bread and savoring the pickled herring.
Did something awaken in him? Lumian glanced at the child in confusion.
"Not bad," Ludwig remarked with a professional air. "The smoky taste is just right. It blends perfectly with the fragrance and seasoning..."
Despite his praise, seven-year-old Lumian couldn't help but find the whole scene with Ludwig's chubby, youthful face and serious demeanor comical.
Port Gati, being near the sea, boasted excellent seafood. The oysters and other shellfish were not only tastier than most restaurants in Trier, but also considerably cheaper. Lumian sipped his brewed apple cider, enjoying the unique local flavors.
With Ludwig's impressive appetite, the eight-person dinner soon ended, leaving only clean plates and bones behind.
Lumian and Lugano, despite not being small eaters themselves, found themselves dwarfed by Ludwig's consumption despite eating two servings each. This was especially impressive considering he'd already devoured afternoon tea and dessert earlier.
I don't see you visiting the washroom often... *Where does all the food go?* Do you have a bottomless pit for a stomach? Lumian mused, sizing Ludwig up. He stood up and turned to Lugano.
"I'm feeling for a drink. Want to join me at the ship's bar?"
"I didn't catch a wink last night. Planned to hit the hay early today." Lugano couldn't wrap his head around his employer's boundless energy. Despite a sleepless night and a full day of travel, Lumian buzzed with life, ready to hit the bar.
Could it be because his Sequence is higher?
The kid with the odd appetite looks pretty charged too...
Lumian didn't extend an invite to the translator. After leaving a late-night snack for Ludwig, he swapped into a plain dark brown jacket and left the room, heading for the first-class bar.

The bar oozed elegance, filled with the soft tunes of a small band. Sparse patrons scattered around, soaking in the quiet atmosphere.
Lumian scanned the scene for a moment from the entrance, then shook his head and exited.
He descended the stairs to the deck, slipping into the bar serving third-class cabins and the regular crew.
A chaos of noise—shouts, cheers, claps, and random singing—saturated the air, echoing around Lumian.
He instantly felt a sense of homecoming. A wave of ease washed over him, and every cell in his body kicked up a notch.
That's more like it... A seasoned regular at the Ol' Tavern from a young age, Lumian swayed a bit as he edged up to the bar counter.
"A glass of La Fée Verte." He thumped the wooden surface.
The bartender, a young man with Feynapotter features, greeted Lumian. His face was slim, adorned with black hair, eyes, and distinct contours. His slightly yellowish skin highlighted his appealing facial features.
"Alright, 10 licks," the bartender replied in Intisian, his foreign accent apparent.
The ship's prices trumps even those in Trier... As Lumian counted out the coins, he noticed the bartender divert his attention and engage with sincerity and enthusiasm.
"Madame, what would you like to drink?"
"A glass of cherry wine," a lady in a thick yellow dress responded, showcasing a pretty face and light green eyes.
"Alright!" The bartender, not seeking payment upfront, prepared to serve the lady.
"I was here first," Lumian reminded the bartender with a smile.
Without hesitation, the bartender replied, "This is such a beautiful and dazzling lady. My heart tells me to serve her first."
Oh, he's truly from Feynapotter... Lumian didn't get upset. Instead, it felt like he was watching a circus act.
Feynapotterians, with their romantic nature and relentless pursuit of love, placed their faith in Earth Mother, emphasizing the importance of women. Men in this kingdom would praise any woman they encountered, openly pursuing those they fancied.
Aurore had once mentioned that Feynapotter's men were masters of country romance. Despite their mushiness and overt sincerity, they didn't come off as cheesy; rather, they exuded a different kind of elegance.
In comparison, the romantic Intisians seemed lacking.
However, influenced by tradition and faith, most Feynapotterians placed great importance on family, reproduction, and children, preferring settled family lives. Unless entering marriage without

coercion, they were akin to the conservative Loenese, finding it challenging to accept extramarital affairs.
While exceptions existed, even in the most conservative Loen Kingdom, the prevalence of adultery wasn't as exaggerated or common as in Intis. Many believed that love didn't necessarily thrive within the confines of marriage.
After the lady settled her tab and departed with the cherry wine, the bartender served Lumian La Fée Verte, garnishing it with a mint leaf.
He remarked without a trace of guilt, "My grandmother always said to give special treatment to every lady, especially the beautiful ones."
"I get it." Lumian slipped back into his role as a regular at Ol' Tavern. Sipping his absinthe, he concocted a tale. "I once had numerous beautiful companions, even more stunning than the last lady. Unfortunately, being just one person, I couldn't marry them all simultaneously..."
The bartender suddenly felt a camaraderie.
"I often feel the same regrets. There are too many beautiful women in this world, and I'm just one person."
"What's your name?"
"Louis, just call me Louis." Lumian provided his alias.
His current identity was Louis Berry.
"I'm Francesco," the bartender shared with Lumian.
The familiar setting, the customary boasting, and the vibrant ambiance left Lumian feeling a bit tipsy, despite not imbibing much.
If not for the mysticism catastrophe, if Aurore were still alive, if he'd already entered university with no other concerns, wouldn't it be nice to just unwind at a bar?
Sea travelers couldn't help but discuss pirates. Bartender Francesco informed Lumian, "With the widespread use of ironclad warship technology on merchant vessels, it's become tough for pirates. Their sailboats can't match these iron-skinned monsters cruising at 16 to 17 knots. They can't plunder them even if they tried!"
Lowering his voice, Francesco continued, "Pirates' go-to strategy now is sending individuals disguised as passengers to board ships from different ports. Once they hit a designated area in the sea, they create internal chaos, gaining initial control and allowing a nearby pirate ship to close in."
"Is that so?" Lumian inquired with interest. "Any guesses on who might be an undercover pirate on this ship?"
Francesco was taken aback.
"It's just the first day. How can I tell?"

Lumian smiled, teasing, "Ever been through something like this before?"

1. From "Le Tour De France Gourmand" ↩

Chapter 511: Warning

Francesco let out a heavy sigh and spoke, "Back in the first half of the year, when I tended bar on another ship, we ran into pirates. Over ten of them were among the passengers. They seized control of the engine and boiler cabins right from the start, repelling any attempts by the crew to fight back. They waited for their pirate vessel to draw near.

"Thank you, Earth Mother. They only ransacked the cabins one by one, and as long as we didn't resist, they left us unharmed. Naturally, the beautiful ladies and gentlemen were excluded. You can't expect pirates to have high moral standards."

Lumian took a sip of mint-flavored absinthe, a smile playing on his lips.

"Aren't they worried that there might be someone like the adventurer Gehrman Sparrow among the passengers? What if they encounter a powerhouse unwilling to part with their money and ready to use force?"

Francesco was caught off guard by Lumian's question.

After a pause, he replied, "Being a pirate involves higher risks, doesn't it?"

"That does make sense," Lumian nodded in agreement.

Francesco went on, "Many merchant ships nowadays hire retired navy personnel, maritime adventurers, and professional mercenaries for protection. They're tough and can handle onboard disturbances. Plus, they make pirates think twice, leaving room for negotiation.

"There was a similar incident on a merchant ship before. Pirates had the upper hand, took control, but hesitated to take on a sailor team led by adventurers. They opted for negotiations, demanded a protection fee, and withdrew without looting the cabins."

Lumian chuckled.

"If I were a pirate, I'd start a security company in Port Gati, offering knowledgeable maritime mercenaries. If ships hire them, I'd earn some fees. If not, well, then it's time for a good old-fashioned plunder. Either way, I'd make a profit."

Francesco eyed the black-haired, green-eyed man in his twenties with surprise and muttered,

"Don't tell me you're an undercover pirate? The maritime factions are in chaos. Can your subordinates protect those who hire you from other pirates? Sigh, that's why I've never liked the sea. Stepping on the ground gives me a greater sense of security.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

A pure Feynapotterian who believes in Earth Mother... Lumian

smiled and asked, "If you don't like the sea, why are you still working as a bartender on the ship?"
Francesco's expression gradually became animated.
"Don't you find it romantic to have an independent kingdom, one that can hardly contact the outside world, floating out at sea? When you meet a beautiful lady here, you'll feel that only the two of you are left in the entire world. You can only rely on each other."
Your ultimate goal is to find a romantic encounter? Sometimes, Lumian found it hard to comprehend the Feynapotterians and some Trieriens who resembled them.
At that moment, Francesco gestured towards a round table.
"That's Philip, the security supervisor of the Flying Bird. He claims to be a retired officer of the Fog Sea fleet. He destroyed numerous pirate ships with his cannons and personally captured many pirates with wanted posters."
Lumian followed Francesco's finger, gazing at the hall illuminated by kerosene chandeliers.
A group of men and women gathered around a round table to the side. In their midst was a middle-aged man with short light-gold hair, light-blue eyes, and a weathered face. Despite his appearance, he didn't exude seriousness or formality.
Philip, clad in a dark-blue tweed crew attire, raised a glass of Lanti Proof and boasted, "When I served on the San Martin, I crossed paths with the Queen of Ailment, Tracy. Back then, she was only Vice Admiral Ailment. Tsk tsk, as expected of the most beautiful woman in the Five Seas...
"I'll tell you this, if we ever encounter a formidable pirate, don't fret. I know them, and I have a certain level of friendship with them. At the very least, I can negotiate...
"Haha, don't ask why naval officers have ties to great pirates. There are many things at sea you don't understand, and it's best not to delve into them..."
The men and women surrounding Philip listened attentively, occasionally expressing surprise at the mention of influential figures or when he narrated thrilling adventure stories.
At some point, Philip's left hand had wrapped around a girl's waist, and she didn't make any attempt to escape. Instead, she wore a shy expression.
Lumian averted his gaze and asked bartender Francesco, "Does he really know so many great pirates? Is he genuinely a retired officer of the Fog Sea fleet?"
Having finished wiping a cup, Francesco spread his hands and said, "Who knows? However, since he took over as the Flying Bird's security supervisor, we haven't faced any pirate attacks during our

five trips out to sea in the past few months. I don't know if it's luck or if he truly knows many pirates and can spot spies at a glance, giving them an advanced warning."
In the Five Seas, where pirates are a constant threat, the likelihood of avoiding encounters on five consecutive long-distance voyages is slim... Lumian turned his body again, scrutinizing Philip, whose skin bore the rough, red, and weathered marks of a seasoned mariner.
It was challenging to discern if this person was a Beyonder, let alone determine his Sequence. However, Lumian could deduce from the physical details that he had spent considerable time at sea.
Lumian focused and briefly observed Philip's luck.
It carried a hint of blood.
There's a possibility of combat and injuries in the future, but it won't endanger his life... Lumian frowned, finishing the absinthe in his hand and requesting another glass of Lanti Proof.
Before long, Philip left the bar with the girl still wrapped around his waist, his face flushed.
Lumian clicked his tongue and shook his head.
"You Intisians."
After a while, rhythmic music filled the bar. Many customers stood up and rushed to the empty space in the middle to dance.
Lumian held the liquor, swaying gently to the rhythm, appearing lost in thought.
Since discovering that the evil god's bestowed beings were up to no good, he hadn't felt this relaxed in a long time.
The Hostel plan was now in the past. The investigation of April Fool's key members could only commence upon reaching Port Santa.
This was a rare vacation.
Estimating that it was time for Ludwig's second late-night snack, Lumian set down his glass and left the bar on the deck.
As Lumian made his way back to the first-class cabin, he suddenly whispered, "Temiboros, is there any way to identify Beyonders on the ship and the passengers disguised as pirates? I want to visit them one by one, warn them to behave, and not interfere with my enjoyment of the journey."
If anyone refused to heed the warning, 007 could assist in collecting the bounty. The Beyonder characteristics they produced could also be exchanged for money!
Termiboros's majestic voice echoed in Lumian's ears.
"Only when you become an Inevitability demigod or switch pathways will you have a solution."

Without waiting for Lumian's response, the sealed Angel added, "With Alista Tudor's lingering aura and the slight corruption of 0-01, there's a high chance that you'll trigger a calamity if you really warn those people."

Does that mean I'm the greatest calamity and just need to take care of myself? Lumian, who had hoped to reorganize the Flying Bird's dark world and ensure a pleasant journey, understood Termiboros's meaning. He had no choice but to give up.

At that moment, the Flying Bird had fallen into a deep slumber. Lumian walked across the solid floor, the faint creaks and muffled cries echoing around him.

Somewhere within the ship, a woman wept in heartbreaking sobs.

Lumian was no stranger to such despair. He'd often heard Miss Ethans, the object of Charlie's admiration at Auberge du Coq Doré, cry in similar anguish.

There are people who suffer everywhere. Sad people... Lumian, influenced by his writer sister, possessed a touch of the artistic spirit.

Shaking his head, he returned to Room 5, his first-class cabin.

Lugano had already retired to the servants' quarters, while Ludwig, clad in pajamas and a nightcap, awaited his late-night snack.

Lumian sighed and retrieved the easily preserved food from his Traveler's Bag, grateful he'd restocked at Port Gati.

He calculated the cost of Ludwig's daily meals—100 verl d'or, translating to almost 40,000 verl d'or annually. A wave of vexation washed over him. At this rate, Ludwig would deplete his savings within two years.

He couldn't help but wonder if Baron Brignais had breathed a sigh of relief upon confirming Ludwig's "disappearance."

After settling the two midnight meals, Lumian quickly washed and settled into the master bedroom.

As the gentle sway of the ship lulled him, his mind drifted off to sleep.

Lumian woke up at 6 a.m., feeling refreshed.

The dining table was bare, Ludwig and Lugano still asleep.

He pushed open the window and stretched, inhaling the crisp morning air.

Just before seven, the doorbell rang.

My breakfast was scheduled to arrive at 8:30 a.m.... Lumian opened the door and found Philip, the Flying Bird's security supervisor with his blond hair, blue eyes, and weathered face, standing before him.

Philip looked grim, a stark contrast to the jovial man he'd been at the bar the previous night.

"I've confirmed that your identification documents are fake."
How did he confirm it? Why did he specially check our identification? Lumian didn't feel that anything about them stood out after they boarded the ship.
Suppressing his confusion, he frowned and asked, "Are you attempting to extort us?"
Philip glanced at the living room and said solemnly, "I don't care who you were or what you plan to do. Just behave yourselves during your stay on the Flying Bird. Enjoy the journey, don't cause any trouble, and we'll all be fine."
He's really confirming if we are problematic... How did this guy do it? He's quite capable. He's not as frivolous and simple as he seems... Lumian replied calmly, not giving in, "I'm afraid I don't understand. Perhaps there's a misunderstanding?"
Philip locked eyes with him for a long moment.
"As long as you understand what I'm saying," he finally replied before turning and walking away.

Chapter 512: Strange Pirate Ship

Lumian watched Philip's retreating figure disappear into the distance, a silent chuckle escaping his lips.

This guy was competent, he had to admit. Gone was the frivolous, greasy, and undisciplined facade he'd displayed at the bar the night before.

It was a common trait among many Intisian men, Lumian observed. When not engaged in demanding work and surrounded by attractive women, they turned into preening peacocks, desperate to display their prowess. Becoming a Beyonder didn't change that fundamental nature.

Demonesses thrived in Intis, especially in Trier. This wasn't just due to the city's underground allure; there was a deeper, more harmonious connection with the society at large.

Lumian wasn't offended by Philip's warning, nor did he take it personally.

He'd planned to enjoy the voyage over the next few days, even considered lending a hand in maintaining order on the ship, becoming a shadow inquisitor of sorts.

But now, his primary concern shifted to how Philip had unmasked their true identities.

Lumian had meticulously combed through Aurore's grimoire, studying the abilities of Low-Sequence Beyonders across 22 pathways, and supplemented his knowledge with information gleaned from various sources over the past months. From this, he formed a preliminary hypothesis.

Philip is likely a Beyonder of one of three pathways—Spectator, Reader, or Arbiter.

One excels at observing minute details and reading people's true thoughts. Another is a master of deduction, their Sequence 7 even being called "Detective." They can detect abnormalities from the most subtle clues. The third, at Sequence 8 Public Security Officer, wields extraordinary control within their jurisdiction, allowing them to sense and trace anomalies...

Given that we haven't spoken directly with Philip before, I can eliminate the Spectator option. Besides, Spectators aren't typically chosen as security supervisors, it's not their forte...

After discovering that there was a problem with us through his abilities and that our origins were unclear, Philip likely checked copies of our identification and sent telegrams to the issuing authorities. And he received confirmation that these three people didn't exist?

This explains the delay in his warning. He'd waited for the

investigation and response before making his move.
This also implies he has a network of helpers across different regions, receives information and feedback, and possesses extensive connections.
Doing this alone wouldn't be possible. He has an organization backing him, something more official, perhaps? He did claim to be a retired officer of the Fog Sea Fleet, after all...
Such a person is indeed well-suited to lead the security on a heavily armed merchant ship like this.
Lumian turned away and closed the door, a wave of relief washing over him.
With such a capable security supervisor at the helm, issuing discrete warnings to potential threats, the journey ahead promised to be relatively safe.
Lumian spent the morning in the comfort of his first-class cabin, Cabin 5, indulging in a leisurely study of Highlander and breaking up his reading with bouts of exercise. Meanwhile, Ludwig, after breakfast, had begged Lugano to take him on a tour of the ship, spending over an hour on deck playing like a genuine child.
Lumian, however, suspected the true purpose of this excursion was to meticulously survey the location and condition of the ship's food reserves.
Before lunch, drawn by the bright sun, Lumian descended to the deck. He rested his hands on the railing and gazed out at the vast, dark-blue expanse of the sea.
From the corner of his eye, he caught sight of Philip, back to his usual casual demeanor. He was now entangled with the girl from the previous night at the bow of the ship, whispering sweet nothings and laughing, the picture of a smitten couple.
You Intisians... Lumian shook his head with a chuckle.
After leaving Trier, he had adjusted his usual phrases to better reflect reality.
Philip and the girl continued their stroll along the deck, their laughter echoing through the air.
With the enhanced hearing of a Hunter, Lumian had no trouble making out the girl's name—Gozia. Though not conventionally beautiful, she exuded a youthful vibrancy that was undeniable.
Lumian watched as Philip's gaze darted beyond the ship's railing, his face hardening for a brief moment.
Following the security supervisor's line of sight, Lumian scanned the horizon, spotting a colossal shadow lurking beneath the undulating waves!
It disappeared as quickly as it appeared, swallowed by the surging sea.

Smaller than the Flying Bird, but far larger than any sea creature... Giant fish, or something more? Lumian mused, a spark of excitement igniting within him.
"My dear, what has captured your attention?" Gozia's voice broke through Philip's reverie.
"My sweetheart, just thinking about which first-class restaurant I'll treat you to later," Philip replied nonchalantly.
Suddenly, a thin veil of fog crept upwards from the sea, obscuring the sun and dimming the surrounding environment.
The passengers and crew on deck remained unfazed, accustomed to such sudden weather changes in the Fog Sea. Although less intense than the Berserk Sea, the unpredictable nature of the region was ever-present.
As Gozia reveled in the first foggy day of their journey, Philip discreetly raised his right arm, gesturing towards the spot where the shadow had vanished.
He doesn't think it's a passing giant fish... Lumian admired the sea ahead with interest. He noticed several crew members ending their breaks and taking their positions, including the gunners.
The peaceful atmosphere was shattered by a loud splash as a monstrous iron-black behemoth surfaced from the depths.
It was a peculiar-looking "ship."
It was covered in a layer of metal, with only thin pipes resembling snail eyes protruding from its hull.
As seawater cascaded off its sides, the upper half of the strange vessel split open, revealing a fearsome array of cannons and masts rising from within, creating a wide deck.
Dozens, perhaps even hundreds of pirates armed with firearms and swords were on the deck, filling the air with their intimidating cries.
A white sail unfurled automatically, right to the top of the mast.
Wow... Lumian marveled inwardly.
He had never seen such a magical vessel before, a vessel that could disappear and reappear from the depths of the sea.
Philip's expression grew increasingly grave.
Beside him, Gozia froze, her eyes wide with terror as she instinctively huddled closer to her lover.
"Which pirate crew is this?"
"Only one man commands such undersea vessels," Philip replied, his voice devoid of its usual frivolity and heavy with grim certainty. "Admiral Deep Sea, Howl Constantine. Judging by the size of this vessel, it's not his flagship, the Newins. It's the Black Octopus, commanded by his most trusted subordinate, Bone Splitter Basil."

Gozia's vision swam, and she nearly fainted.
The night before, during their conversation, Philip had mentioned the infamous maritime kings and pirate admirals who ruled the Five Seas. Among them, Howl Constantine, who had recently risen to the rank of Admiral, was shrouded in mystery.
Legend whispered of his monstrous heritage, claiming he possessed the blood of sea monsters. He had even ventured into the ruins of a sunken city, recovering the relics of ancient alchemists: two stealth boats capable of navigating the depths of the ocean unseen.
Inspired by these vessels, the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery had attempted to develop their own undersea fleet. However, they failed to mass produce them. Due to the reliance on higher Sequence Beyonders, only one or two of these vessels could be assigned to each Intisian fleet, each serving specialized functions.
Of Admiral Deep Sea's two undersea vessels, the first, the Newins, was a behemoth rivaling the Flying Bird in size. Inspired by a renowned maritime treasure legend, it served as Howl Constantine's flagship. The second, the Black Octopus, which had just emerged from the depths, was entrusted to his most trusted subordinate, Bone Splitter Basil.
He was an equally formidable figure, known for his cold-blooded brutality and ruthless tactics. He took pleasure in torturing his captives, and the bounty on his head, far exceeding that of most non-Admiral pirates, stood at a staggering 250,000 verl d'or.
The revelation of the Black Octopus and Bone Splitter Basil plunged Gozia into a pit of despair.
How could a mere armed merchant ship like the Flying Bird possibly stand against such notorious pirates from the Five Seas?
What horrors awaited them under Bone Splitter Basil's reign of terror?
Philip, however, had no time for his new lover's distress. His full attention was focused on the unfolding spectacle of the Black Octopus and its menacing cannons, ready to unleash their fury at any moment.
Standing a short distance away, Lumian felt a thrill coursing through his veins when he heard the name Bone Splitter Basil, the strongest subordinate to Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine. This was not nervousness, but the exhilarating feeling from catching a whiff of iron and blood.
This was one of the Hunters' belligerence.
Even after fully digesting the potions, a Beyonder would still be affected by them.

Lumian's emerald eyes, sharp as an eagle's, locked onto the bizarre iron-
black ship as he formulated his next move.
Once Bone Splitter Basil emerged and the two vessels closed the distance, Lumian planned to "teleport" behind the infamous pirate and unleash the Spell of Harrumph.
If the Spell of Harrumph's effect proved insufficient and failed to incapacitate Basil, Lumian would don his Flog boxing gloves, instill a specific desire within his opponent, and "teleport" again, creating greater distance before activating the Symphony of Hatred, amplifying the instilled desire to a maddening degree.
With Bone Splitter Basil severely wounded and momentarily incapacitated, Lumian would seize the opportunity to unleash his full Hunter arsenal, striking the enemy down with devastating blows.
To prevent interference from the surrounding pirates, he could potentially create a Bottle of Fiction and isolate Bone Splitter Basil for a one-on-one duel...
A complex plan, complete with contingency measures, raced through Lumian's mind, causing a slight tremor in his body, as if anticipating the thrill of the coming battle.
Just as the tension reached a peak and a naval confrontation seemed imminent, the pirates aboard the Black Octopus turned as one, their eyes fixed in shock upon the stairs leading deeper into the vessel.
A few seconds later, the bizarre iron-black ship made an abrupt turn, altering its course and steering away from the Flying Bird.
With swift precision, the exposed sections of the Black Octopus retracted, sealing its interior once more.
In the eyes of Lumian and the others, the Black Octopus rapidly distanced itself, diving back into the depths of the foggy sea.
In the blink of an eye, it transformed into a mere shadow, disappearing completely.
"E-escaped?" Uttering the word after a long moment of dazed silence, Gozia turned to her lover, her voice filled with surprise and confusion.
Bone Splitter Basil and his Black Octopus were simply leaving?
Without a fight, without plundering?
Philip, himself bewildered, stared at the spot where the Black Octopus had vanished, forcing a smile onto his face.
"Didn't I tell you that I know many great pirates?"

Chapter 513: Worry

Gozia's gaze instantly turned fervent upon hearing Philip's response, her admiration evident.

Have they escaped? Lumian's lips twitched. The Black Octopus's abrupt change of course and sudden dive left him speechless.

The maneuver caught him off guard, leaving him frozen for a critical moment.

This incredible underwater ship, commanded by a great pirate with a massive bounty, simply turned tail and fled without even firing a single cannon?

How could one be a pirate with such puny guts?

Bone Splitter Basil? With a bounty of 250,000 verl d'or and a fearsome reputation? Don't even think about showing your face on the high seas again!

Lumian cursed under his breath, then frowned thoughtfully. Why had Bone Splitter Basil fled without revealing himself?

I could understand if it was the Blood Emperor's aura I activated that made you run so fast, but why now?

It couldn't be that he targeted the wrong ship, did he? The Flying Bird isn't the merchant vessel he wanted to plunder, so he was rushing to corner his real prey?

Did he somehow sense that hijacking this ship would lead to disaster?

If he truly possessed the power of divination or prophecy, they would have known not to come. He wouldn't have had to embarrass himself in front of the crew and passengers, only to turn back and drift aimlessly...

Danger Premonition? A Hunter's danger intuition wouldn't react so strongly until it's face-to-face with the threat...

Then it hit him. A Sequence that had him wary for months: Sequence 6 Devil of the Criminal pathway!

Beyonders at this Sequence possessed a unique ability called "Malicious Perception."

If someone within their range intended to cause them lethal harm and acted on it within a specific timeframe, they could sense the source of the danger and identify their attacker.

Bone Splitter Basil... a Devil? His title and reputation certainly fit...

I had just formulated a hunting plan for him, intending to "teleport" over after confirming the situation. Did he sense my malice and confirm the extent of the danger before swiftly deciding to escape?

Hey, you're a Devil. Are you running away without a fight? I'm not even confident in defeating a Devil. Besides, you're on your

alchemical boat with a large number of subordinates around you. You probably don't lack mystical items. Do you have to be so cowardly?
The plan I envisioned had a high success rate, so much so that Basil's ability to sense danger exceeded his endurance. Therefore, he didn't take the risk and chose the most effective and safest response—escape? The more Lumian pondered, the more he felt that this guess was close to the truth.
This amused him as well.
To be honest, his plan was quite idealistic. He didn't consider the Bone Splitter Sequence or the abilities of the surrounding pirates, nor did he consider how to use the Bottle of Fiction to single out Basil for a one-on-one battle. All of this depended on his subsequent observations of the Black Octopus
Hunters might not be the ones who charged forward to fight from the beginning. They might even be the last to appear and be responsible for harvesting.
But did such a simple plan and malice scare away a Devil in advance?
Lumian suspected that Basil might not be able to sense the specific plan. It was only because he had the Angel of Inevitability, the Blood Emperor's aura, Mr. Fool's seal, and 0-01's mild corruption, regardless of whether they were powerful or not, that they combined with a feasible plan and clear malice. It strongly agitated the Bone Splitter, making him feel that the impending danger was beyond his ability to handle. Hence, the scene just now.
Are all Devils so timid? Lumian cursed silently and left the deck in disappointment, returning to Room 5 of the first-class cabin.
At that moment, the exclusive attendant had arrived with lunch. Ludwig focused on the delicacies, while Lugano lingered by the window, his face filled with excitement.
Upon seeing Lumian's return, the Doctor exclaimed excitedly, "Just now, a great pirate appeared—Bone Splitter Basil, Admiral Deep Sea Howl Constantine's most formidable captain. He even operates the Black Octopus. H-have you heard of the Black Octopus? It's a mystical ship that can dive to the seabed!"
"I heard it from someone at the bar last night," Lumian replied honestly.
Prior to this, he didn't know much about Admiral Deep Sea and his pirate crew. All he knew was that there was such a pirate admiral. After all, Howl Constantine was quite mysterious and rarely appeared in newspapers and magazines that recorded sea stories. His only appearance in The Adventurer series was his title and

name, giving him a background without any plot lines.
Lugano didn't hide his emotions.
"I witnessed the mystical pirate ship with my own eyes. It truly surfaced from the seabed and can bloom like a flower!
"I thought we'd clash with the Bone Splitter and use your teleportation abilities to escape. To my surprise, Black Octopus chose to leave after observing for just over ten seconds."
Over ten seconds? Aren't you looking down on Bone Splitters? It was a few seconds! Lumian retorted inwardly.
Lugano continued, "When I chatted with a few sailors this morning, they told me that the Flying Bird's security supervisor is a formidable retired officer who knows many great pirates. I thought they were boasting, but from the looks of it, that security supervisor isn't simple. It's really possible that he has ties to many great pirates. That's why Bone Splitter Basil didn't plunder the Flying Bird!"
"That's right, that's right," Lumian echoed.
Rip... Ludwig tore off the oily skin and meat from a duck leg.
Lumian glanced at the boy, who was engrossed in his food, and suddenly had a new idea.
Could the malice and danger that Bone Splitter Basil sensed be more than one? Could it not be solely from me?
Ludwig might have swallowed hard upon hearing the word "bone dismantling"...
However, even though this walking bottomless stomach when compared to me appears high-ranking, he lacks the corresponding abilities...
...
To celebrate the fact that the Flying Bird hadn't been plundered by the Black Octopus, the captain hosted a party on the deck in the evening, featuring clowns, magicians, and beast tamers. He treated everyone to three glasses of beer.
Late at night, the third-class bar bustled with activity. Philip became the center of attention, surrounded by nearly all the patrons. They took turns praising him and treating him to drinks.
They were all grateful to the security supervisor for using his friendship with Bone Splitter Basil to persuade the great pirate to leave and prevent the passengers of the Flying Bird from suffering.
Lumian, seated at the bar counter and engaged in conversation with bartender Francesco, savored the Lanti Proof. His gaze casually swept across Philip's face, and he noticed a hint of seriousness and worry beneath the blond-haired, blue-eyed middle-aged man's frivolous smile.
In other words, he wasn't that happy.

Yes, I'm sure he didn't scare the Black Octopus away... Heh heh, you're still relatively clear-headed. It's not something to celebrate knowing that a huge problem approached your ship but abnormally chose to leave. This often means that there's greater trouble lurking on your ship... Lumian chuckled inwardly and averted his gaze. He continued to converse with bartender Francesco about the beautiful women in the third-class cabin.
After nearly an hour, Philip squeezed out of the drunken crowd and sat beside Lumian with his lover, Gozia.
He knocked on the table and ordered a glass of golden beer. Casually, he said, "You actually enjoy drinking in such a rowdy place."
"The girls here are more enthusiastic than in first class." Lumian could roughly guess Philip's motive for coming, but he didn't inquire further.
Philip chuckled. "That's true."
Casually, he inquired, "What did you do when the Black Octopus arrived?"
"Don't you remember? I wasn't far from you. Don't you know what I did?" Lumian replied candidly.
Philip nodded slightly and didn't press further.
Lumian took a sip of liquor and asked with a smile, "Do you think there's a huge problem on the ship that scared off that little troublemaker?"
Philip turned his head and glanced at Lumian, not too surprised that he had made such a connection.
"What are you two talking about?" The tipsy Gozia couldn't quite grasp the conversation between the two men.
It was as if they were speaking in riddles.
"That's the most logical explanation I can come up with," Philip replied, ignoring his lover's question.
Lumian asked with interest, "Who do you think is suspicious?"
From yesterday afternoon to noon today, the security supervisor must have warned many people.
Philip set down his beer mug and massaged his temples.
After some thought, he smiled. "I wanted to tell you, but I don't think that's necessary now."
"Why?" Lumian inquired curiously.
Philip took another sip of his beer and chuckled.
"As long as that huge problem doesn't erupt on the ship, it won't be a problem for me.
"As you can see, it hasn't revealed itself and is quietly hiding. This means that it might just want to reach the archipelago or Port Santa without a hitch."

At this point, Philip sighed and said with experience, "Many times, when you see an abnormality, there's no need to care or figure out the truth. Pretending not to notice and patiently waiting for the abnormality to leave is the best choice.

"The abnormality that didn't erupt isn't abnormal. Your investigation and investigation might agitate it, escalating the problem and causing the catastrophe to truly descend.

"As long as that abnormality doesn't truly harm us, try your best to maintain reverence and avoid stimulation. That's one of the key reasons why I've been able to survive at sea until now."

Lumian nodded gently and said, "A relative of mine once mentioned that in certain events, those who can't see, hear, speak, or smell are more likely to survive."

Philip smiled and extended his right hand.

"I'm glad you share that understanding."

This was his true motive for coming to talk to Lumian. He wanted Lumian, who was using a fake identity, not to be curious and try to figure out the hidden trouble on the ship.

That might implicate the entire ship!

Understanding Philip's meaning, Lumian couldn't help but raise his eyebrows.

Does this mean there are other troubles on the ship?

Chapter 514: Huge Wave

Lumian took a moment to consider. He didn't think there was any real danger.

Philip's concern was based on Bone Splitter Basil's reaction, which only hinted at a potential problem on the ship. While Philip knew which passengers and crew members were suspicious, he couldn't pinpoint the real source of the trouble. He wasn't even sure if he was right, and wouldn't dare to be certain. Therefore, his suspect might not be the actual issue.

In other words, it was more likely that the real problem was actually sitting right beside him: Lumian and his new godson, Ludwig. However, Philip wasn't aware of this, and by excluding them, would mistakenly focus on other suspects.

Apart from Ludwig and me, whether there are other serious problems or not, Philip is right, Lumian thought, letting out a soft sigh. Before any major troubles surface, it's best not to investigate or provoke them. We'll pretend not to see, hear, or speak, and wait for them to reach their destination and leave the Flying Bird...

Of course, this depends on the situation remaining stable. If any abnormalities arise, we'd have to find a way to resolve them immediately. Sometimes, pretending not to see things doesn't prevent them from worsening. The Cordu catastrophe is a gruesome reminder of that... Lumian thought and sighed softly.

He turned around and extended his hand, briefly shaking Philip's with a smile.

"I'm glad we reached an agreement."

Philip breathed a sigh of relief, retracted his right hand, and downed his golden malt beer.

He had been worried that someone like Louis Berry, who used a fake identity and was suspected of being a criminal, would be stubborn and adventurous. He was concerned that Louis wouldn't listen to reason and would insist on uncovering the "huge problem" that scared off the Black Octopus.

Philip felt no sympathy for someone who might die because of their own foolishness, but he didn't want them to endanger everyone else.

Thankfully, Louis Berry seemed like someone who could be reasoned with.

As Philip drained his beer, he kept assuring himself:

The Fog Sea Archipelago wasn't far from the Republic. In fact, its proximity was why Intis had chosen it as its first overseas colony. The Flying Bird wouldn't need to stop at other ports for supplies on its journey, allowing it to arrive directly.

Assuming the weather remained calm, the Flying Bird should dock in Farim, the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, by the following evening. If they encountered bad weather, they might need to slow down, change course, or seek refuge in another port. The latest they could arrive would be noon the day after tomorrow.
Perhaps that troublesome problem would disembark in Port Farim?
Even if something was brewing beneath the surface, it wouldn't fully erupt in just a day or two.
Endure, and it would be over!
Reassured, Philip—hugging his lover, Gozia—rose from his barstool and left the bustling bar.
Lumian continued sipping his Lanti Proof, seemingly unfazed.
With a smile, he turned to the bartender, Francesco, and remarked, "I've heard that many Feynapotterians are homesick. Even when they have to leave for work, they often return home, write letters, or send telegrams. You, however, chose to work overseas, on a ship that makes it difficult to stay in touch with the outside world."
Francesco raised his hand and gestured. "While I love my family dearly, families like ours, with generations living together, often face various problems and conflicts. My grandmother, a wise woman, manages us well, but it can be stifling for the younger generation. There are too many elders eager to share their life experiences.
"Furthermore, my home is in Port Santa. The Flying Bird docks there almost every month. So, for me, this job is both work and a trip home."
It's just like the book that described Feynapotterian customs. Feynapotterians enjoy living in large families spanning multiple generations. And in such families, the most senior woman who has given birth becomes the natural matriarch, controlling the entire family's affairs, regardless of whether her husband is alive. In a religious sense, such a woman is considered the embodiment of Earth Mother within the family... His chat with Bartender Francesco wasn't purely for relaxation. He had two goals: Firstly, he wanted to understand the passengers better through Francesco's eyes. His final destination was Port Santa, which was five to six days away. Paying attention to the various details of life on the Flying Bird was crucial. Secondly, he wanted to verify the information in his books and gain a grasp of local customs in the Feynapotter Kingdom. Missing out on important knowledge could lead him to misinterpret situations in Port Santa.
...

The night passed peacefully, save for a child waking up twice to eat, the rhythmic chewing noises hardly disturbing Lumian's sleep. The gentle rocking of the ship and the waves outside his window created a lulling atmosphere.
Just when he thought the Flying Bird would smoothly reach Port Farim, the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, by evening, the weather took a sudden turn.
The sea, previously veiled in a thin fog, began to seethe. Giant waves, like towering mountains, rose and fell in rapid succession.
The Flying Bird bobbed precariously on the waves, its air of colossal power replaced by vulnerability.
Now, it was a mere leaf tossed between the sky and the sea, a toy in the hands of a giant. Tiny and fragile, it seemed ready to capsize at any moment.
Oddly, the massive waves were not accompanied by darkness or torrential rain. Instead, the howling wind dispersed the fog above, revealing a clear azure sky.
A sailor scrambled down from the observation deck and, holding his telescope to Philip, shouted, "Boss, this wave isn't right!
"Only our area has waves this big! Everywhere else is calm!
"There's no rain here either!"
Philip, holding onto Gozia who trembled pale from the force of the elements, instinctively furrowed his brow.
Abnormal waves?
Had that "major problem" caused them?
No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than the Flying Bird was flung into the air by a monstrous wave, only to be slammed onto another.
Terrifying jolts and tremors reverberated through the air, eliciting screams of fear from many passengers.
They sensed the Flying Bird teetering on the brink of capsizing, a shipwreck imminent.
In first-class cabin number 5, Lugano stared calmly out the window, gripping the frame as the dining table slid across the room with the force of the storm.
He knew that if the Flying Bird couldn't withstand the tempest, Lumian Lee would undoubtedly "teleport" him and Ludwig to safety in Port Farim.
Lumian, gazing at the strangely calm azure sea beyond the monstrous waves, sensed something amiss.
He wasted no time, retrieving the Mystery Prying Glasses from his Traveler's Bag, hoping to uncover the hidden cause of this disaster.
As the brown, gold-rimmed glasses settled on the bridge of his nose, a familiar dizziness washed over him. He saw a chaotic

montage of scenes around him unfold.
On deck, a tidal wave surged, tossing Philip. Clutching a rope in desperation, he descended rapidly with Gozia. He instinctively positioned himself below her, shielding his new lover from the fall. He landed with a heavy thud, the rope burning a gash into his palm, drawing blood.
Chaos reigned in the dining hall as plates, knives, and forks flew through the air; customers were flung around.
In one room, a blurry figure of a woman sat by the window, sobbing uncontrollably.
The boiler chamber was a scene of disarray, scattered coal littering the floor. Beneath it crawled a horrifying horde of creatures resembling seashells.
And beneath the deceptively calm azure surface, a peculiar fish gazed up at the beleaguered Flying Bird!
Its size rivaled that of a shark, its grayish-black body devoid of scales, replaced instead by numerous, pulsing meatballs. These strange orbs shimmered with an interconnected, faint starlight, forming cryptic symbols. It sported a pair of eyes on each side of its head, and its gaping maw was as sharp as a flagpole.
Surrounding this strange fish and numerous similar fish seemed to form a school.
With a sharp gasp, Lumian ripped off the Mystery Prying Glasses and stuffed them back into his Traveler's Bag, his chest heaving.
He suspected the strange fish were behind the violent waves, though it was unclear if the wind was a consequence of the upheaval or a separate cause.
Knowing the strange fish were submerged, Lumian discarded the idea of using a massive fireball to guide the Flying Bird's cannons towards them.
Instead, he activated the black mark on his right shoulder and "teleported" himself to the nearby patch of sea he had just witnessed.
As he did so, he retrieved the blackened bone flute adorned with dark-red holes.
General Philip's Symphony of Hatred!
Lumian materialized mid-air and, while descending, brought the bone flute to his lips.
He had learned the flute from shepherds during his time in Cordu, and over the past few days, he had been diligently practicing and refining his skills. Now, he began to play a melodious tune, one filled with a longing for home.
It was a favorite melody among the wandering shepherds.
The muffled explosions of fireballs churned the water, slowing

Lumian's descent. But amidst his melody, a new tune, one that seemed to emanate from the depths of destiny itself, pierced through the seawater and reached the "ears" of the strange fish and their kind below.
Suddenly, the strange fish froze. A mountain-like wave descended, but no new ones followed.
Boom! Boom! Boom! The smaller fish surrounding the strange fish exploded from their heads, turning on their own kind in a frenzy. Others simply died and floated to the surface.
Lumian's descent accelerated as his feet, legs, and body submerged into the icy sea.
He continued playing the shepherds' longing melody, feeling the seawater reach his neck and threatening to engulf his mouth.
The next moment, dark-red blood oozed from the four eyes and multiple bumps on the shark-sized fish.
The terrifying waves subsided rapidly.
With only half his head above water, Lumian lowered the bone flute and smiled. He activated Spirit World Traversal once more.
Cough, cough, cough! As he materialized back in Room 5 of the first-class cabin, salty seawater spewed from his mouth.
In his eagerness to ensure the effectiveness of the music, he had stopped playing too late, ending up swallowing a mouthful of seawater. Additionally, fearing that too much commotion would disrupt the "teleportation," he had held his breath until returning before choking.
Is this a form of unluckiness? Lumian mused.
Lugano, startled by Lumian's drenched state, asked, "Is it resolved?"
"Seems like it," Lumian replied with a smile.
His shoes and trouser legs bore the marks of wear and tear, scorched and dripping seawater.
At that moment, cheers erupted across the Flying Bird as passengers and crew noticed the receding waves.
"Praise the Sun!"
"By steam!"
"Thank you, Mother of All Things!"
"..."

Chapter 515: Strange Fish

Philip, unlike the other jubilant crew and passengers, pushed Gozia away whilst ignoring the pain in his back and palms and dashed to the ship's side, eyes scanning the vast expanse of the sea.

He shifted relentlessly, searching for anything unusual, anything out of place.

Then, a muffled cry pierced the air.

Stunned, he pinpointed the source and sprinted towards the Flying Bird's bow.

The cry grew louder, more desperate. Philip saw a crimson stain blossoming on the distant blue, a large shadow shifting beneath.

The shadow rapidly materialized into a monstrous fish with four eyes—grayish-blue orbs replacing scales and a terrifyingly sharp mouth.

This wasn't a small fish. It writhed and thrashed, frantic flicks of its tail sending water droplets flying.

Waves surged around it, reaching heights of five to six meters even without the wind's aid, crashing down with thunderous force.

The shrill cries subsided momentarily, and the four-eyed monster, gripped by palpable fear, plunged back into the depths, swimming away with a speed that belied its size.

Its remaining brethren followed close behind.

In the first-class cabin 5 by the window, Lumian changed into dry clothes with the casual indifference of someone unobserved.

He knew the Symphony of Hatred had ignited the four-eyed fish's terror, which is why he opted for a swift "teleport" back instead of leaping into the air and unleashing another devastating attack while the creature surfaced.

Fear would drive the monster away and prevent it from unleashing its full fury and raising further havoc.

"Phew," Philip breathed, relief washing over him as the four-eyed fish disappeared from sight.

"Thank goodness, thank goodness," he muttered, his voice filled with gratitude. He spread his arms wide and exclaimed, "Praise the Sun!"

"Do you know that fish?"

A voice suddenly broke the silence beside Philip.

He turned in surprise to see Louis Berry, with his black hair, green eyes, and sharp features, standing beside him.

His lover, Gozia, stood hesitantly at the cabin entrance, wanting to approach but afraid of approaching the shipboard.

"It's the Mutated Bannerfish. Heh heh, that's what scholars call it.

At sea, they have another name for it—Death Navigators," Philip answered Lumian's question, pressing his hand against the shipboard for support.
"Death Navigators? Why haven't I heard of it?" Lumian asked, genuinely curious.
To be honest, his knowledge of Beyonder creatures was limited. His previous experiences mainly involved dealing with Beyonders, heretics, and Rampagers.
Philip glanced at him, exhaled, and smiled faintly.
"These fish-like creatures have only appeared in recent years. Many sailors call them the sea's demons."
Only appeared in recent years... Lumian frowned thoughtfully.
Such descriptions often pointed towards the corruption of evil gods, environmental anomalies, or natural disasters.
"Has it only recently appeared in the Fog Sea, or was there no legend of such a fish in the Five Seas?" Lumian interrupted Philip's explanation, eager to clarify his doubts.
Philip pondered for a moment before speaking.
"I used to serve in the Fog Sea fleet. Apart from the Fog Sea, I've only traveled the North Sea. I don't know much about the Berserk Sea, the Sonia Sea, or the Polar Sea, but until a few years ago, I never heard any mention of such a strange fish from the crew, pirates, or colleagues from other fleets."
Could they be fish corrupted by an evil god? Lumian suddenly felt grateful that he hadn't impulsively tried to eliminate the Mutated Bannerfish.
Not only would it have exposed his Beyonder powers to the many crew members and passengers, but it could have also led to unforeseen dangers. And for what?
A pile of trash that would only be good enough to feed Ludwig!
Seeing that Louis Berry was no longer fixated on the detail, Philip continued, "Mutated Bannerfish appear on fog-free nights, hovering upright as if silently observing the cosmos. Many sailors and pirates have witnessed this sight, believing the fish are summoning an evil entity.
"Think about it. The night sea is pitch black, the crimson moon barely visible, and only starlight illuminates the terrifying, distorted fish heads silently emerging from the water, motionless and arranged in strange patterns... It's enough to scare anyone!"
Gazing at the cosmos... Could they have been corrupted by an evil god's power for some reason? Lumian pondered for a few seconds before asking, "Why are they called Death Navigators?"
Philip rubbed his cheeks.
"After surveying the cosmos, the Mutated Bannerfish remain on

the surface, forming two lines like an arrowhead that points towards a specific spot in the sea, as if guiding some unknown creature.
"Some pirates, adventurers, and treasure hunters believe this points to valuable items or hidden treasures, so they try to follow the Mutated Bannerfish to see where they lead.
"But none of the ships that attempted this ever returned, and the crew vanished.
"That's why we call them Death Navigators."
Philip sighed and continued, "I once heard from sailors that the Death Navigators can control the waves. Judging by what we just saw, this rumor seems very likely, and it's much worse than I imagined.
"Right, that Mutated Bannerfish must have been relatively powerful even among Death Navigators.
"However, no Death Navigator has ever attacked a human ship before..."
A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.
"Perhaps they attacked, but no one survived to spread the news."
Philip was taken aback.
"That's true. In such a tidal wave, once a ship capsizes or shatters, only those with special abilities would stand a chance."
He paused and muttered to himself, "Did that troublesome figure provoke the Death Navigators' attack?"
"It's possible," Lumian replied sincerely.
After confirming that the Death Navigators hadn't returned, Philip turned to the passengers and crew huddled by the window and cabin entrance.
"The danger has passed! The weather has returned to normal!"
The humans, who had cheered earlier, erupted in relieved cries, praising their deities.
Philip looked away and pondered, "Did the Death Navigator ultimately succumb to that unknown threat? I could feel its immense fear."
"It's possible," Lumian replied with the same sincerity.
With this interlude, the Flying Bird increased its speed and arrived at Port Farim, the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, before nightfall.
The sun set behind Saint Tick Island, casting a crimson glow over the distant sea, vast forests, and the dormant brown volcano. The sight was magnificent and breathtaking.
Farim, in the native language of the Fog Sea Archipelago, meant "having fragrance and sweetness." Saint Tick Island was rich in cloves, nutmeg, pepper, and sugarcane. Fruits were mainly

bananas and grapes, while the rest of the land was planted with cotton.
Looking at the white-walled, red-roofed buildings lining the coastline, the masts, sails, and smokestacks emitting fog, Lumian chuckled and said, "Emperor Roselle, who named this city back then, probably didn't expect Farim to become the last bastion of the indigenous language."
Under generations of cultural genocide, the current Islanders could only speak Intisian. Their native language had been lost long ago.
There might be elders in the primitive tribes living deep within the forest who still understood the indigenous language, but in all the colonial cities and surrounding plantations, one language reigned supreme—Intisian.
Of course, the Fog Sea Archipelago had its own unique dialects, a blend of Intisian and indigenous languages, rarely used by Intisians outside this region.
"Are you disembarking?" Lugano inquired of Lumian.
The Flying Bird wouldn't be leaving the port until the next afternoon.
"Of course," Lumian replied with a hint of excitement. "Now that we're here in Farim, I can't miss the chance to try their famous Golden Somme! Would you like to lead the way, bringing me and Ludwig around, or would you prefer to stay here and keep an eye on him?"
The Fog Sea Archipelago was known for its superior sugarcane, and the sugar liquor produced from its syrup, called "Golden Somme," was legendary.
Lugano's first instinct was to accompany his employer, as he felt safer around Lumian's capable and decisive presence. However, after a moment of reflection, the Doctor decided it would be wiser to stay on board.
While Lumian was undeniably formidable, his talent for attracting trouble was equally impressive!
Leaving Ludwig with enough food for dinner and two rounds of late-night snacks, Lumian disembarked from the Flying Bird, dressed in a white shirt, a black vest, a dark jacket, and matching pants.
In Trier, it was already early autumn, and the air was crisp with chill. However, the Fog Sea Archipelago seemed to be enjoying the tail end of summer. Though the air was warm, it was quickly dispersed by the refreshing sea breeze.
As Lumian strolled out of the port, he spotted a brown-skinned, wrinkled old woman with black features selling golden straw hats across the street.

These hats were woven from a local plant called Golden Leaves, which was favored by the believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun religion. Wearing one supposedly gave the illusion of having the sun shining directly overhead.
Intrigued by the idea, Lumian purchased a hat for 5 licks and placed it on his head. He then continued his leisurely stroll towards the nearby square.
In the heart of the square stood a Sun Obelisk, surrounded by numerous notices adorned with wanted posters.
Lumian stopped, his hands instinctively slipping into his pockets. Before the sun dipped below the horizon, he scanned the wanted posters and committed the bounties to memory.
"Queen Mystic, one of the maritime kings... Bounty of 100 million verl d'or.
"King of the Five Seas Nast, one of the maritime kings... Bounty of 20 million verl d'or.
"Queen of Stars Cattleya, one of the maritime kings... Bounty of 11 million verl d'or.
"King of Immortality Agalito, one of the maritime kings... Bounty of 4 million verl d'or.
"Queen of Ailment Tracy, one of the maritime kings... Bounty of 3 million verl d'or.
"King of Dusk Bulatov Ivan, one of the maritime kings... Bounty of 2.6 million verl d'or..."
Observing Lumian's intense scrutiny of the six maritime kings' wanted posters, an adventurer standing beside him couldn't resist cracking a joke.
"Looking to hunt the maritime kings, eh?"

Chapter 516: Questioning Method

Lumian whirled back to face the teasing man.

"Doesn't every adventurer who comes to sea dream of following in Gehrman Sparrow's great footsteps?"

The joking adventurer wasn't past his twenties. Curly brown hair topped a gaunt face, his Intis-blue eyes sparkling with amusement. Despite the unkempt stubble adorning his chin, he emanated a middle-class Trier air, refined in his details.

His attire: a thin blue coat, white pants, and brown boots. A large-caliber revolver and an exquisite rapier balanced his waist.

Lumian's retort and lofty aspirations seemed to surprise the adventurer. He chuckled after a moment, "Even Sparrow didn't manage to hunt down any pirate kings."

"Wasn't Gehrman Sparrow the one who supposedly killed Barros Hopkins, the vanished King of Black Throne, one of the original Four Kings of the Sea?" Although The Adventurer series hadn't touched upon it yet, Lumian was a dedicated reader of maritime tales in newspapers and magazines.

The adventurer scoffed, "Unconfirmed. Only when it's inked into The Adventurer series is it truth. They say Fors Wall was specially hired by the Church of The Fool to promote Sparrow's exploits."

Just as I suspected, the famous author, Fors Wall, operates under the protection of The Fool Church, allowing her to write without fear about the secrets of the great pirates... Lumian asked with interest, "So, the relationship between Gehrman Sparrow, the former Vice Admiral Ailment, and the current Queen of Ailment is real?"

"I'd bet on it. The Queen of Ailment herself has never denied it," the adventurer replied, clearly enjoying the conversation.

After their chat, the adventurer, with his playful demeanor, found Lumian even more appealing. He smiled and asked, "How should I address you? After learning your name and you becoming a legend like Gehrman Sparrow, I can brag to other adventurers that I knew you before you became famous."

His last sentence was laced with good-natured jest.

"Louis Berry," Lumian offered his alias. "*What about you?* Perhaps you'll be the next Gehrman Sparrow."

"Batna Comté." The adventurer with the wide-aperture revolver and exquisite rapier chuckled and said, "I don't expect to end up like Gehrman Sparrow. I wouldn't mind becoming the next Blazing Danitz or even the former Strongest Hunter of the Fog Sea, Anderson. That would be quite satisfying."

Quite ambitious... He doesn't seem like a newbie to the seas...

Lumian quickly assessed Batna, unconsciously slipping into a Conspirer's mindset. He still believes achieving power like Blazing Danitz is possible after everything he's seen. That suggests a strong sense of self-belief... *Could he be a Beyonder as well?*

Adjusting his golden straw hat, Lumian smiled at Batna Comté. "Drink's on me. How about it?"

Stepping into Port Farim, the bustling capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago, Saint Tick Island, Lumian carried a double purpose: to unearth more pirate intel and acquire the remaining supplementary ingredients for the Reaper potion.

This mission demanded contact with Beyonders and local information brokers.

As his thoughts raced, Madam Magician's reward flickered across his mind:

"Reaper potion formula:

"Sequence: 5;

"Main ingredients: Gray Demonic Wolf's front claws, Forest Hunter's tongue;

"Supplementary ingredients: 80 milliliters of Gray Demonic Wolf's blood, two Forest Hunter's fangs, 10 drops of Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom, and 10 drops of hornbeam essential oil;

"Ritual: Plan and execute a successful capture of a target with a Sequence higher than your own. Flaunt the completed conspiracy before them, and consume the potion as they witness your victory, filled with fear and despair.

"Note 1: The increased number and higher Sequence the captured targets and the greater their fear, regret, and anger, the more potent the ritual's effect.

"Note 2: The two main ingredients can be substituted with Gardner Martin's Beyonder characteristic. His blood and two teeth can also replace the Gray Demonic Wolf's blood and Forest Hunter's fangs, respectively.

In other words, Lumian only had one sole missing ingredient: the venom of the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard. This ingredient hinted at a rare creature. Fortunately, hornbeam essential oil, a common ingredient among mysticism enthusiasts, was already in his possession before he left Trier.

"Alright." Batna Comté didn't reject Lumian's invitation.

The two walked towards a side street off the square, where a bustling open- air market unfolded.

Towering piles of fruits lined the roadside, while stalls brimmed with Golden Leaves straw hats, juicy sugarcane, sweet scones, savory roasted meat, native cigarettes, and fried banana slices. Brownish-black Islanders, foreign sailors, curious tourists, and

seasoned adventurers mingled around barbecue stalls, sharing drinks and laughter.
Two nearby bars, their doors flung open, offered round tables spilling onto the sidewalk, inviting passersby to linger and enjoy a drink.
Batna surveyed the lively scene and cautioned Lumian, "Seems like this is your first visit to the archipelago. Remember, never trust an Islander.
"Their outward deference and meekness mask their true intentions. They dream of swindling our money and selling us for a hefty price. If you lack the strength and intelligence to put them in their place, their evil thoughts will surely be put into action."
Lumian met Batna's gaze and chuckled.
"Did they take advantage of you when you first arrived?"
Batna fell silent, avoiding the question.
Lumian didn't press further. He spent two licks for a small bag of freshly fried banana slices. The crisp exterior gave way to a soft, sweet interior, bursting with flavor.
As he chewed, Batna muttered, "Those are just for children and women."
How could a grown man, determined to follow in Gehrman Sparrow's great footsteps, be indulging in fried banana slices?
In theory, at least, I'm still a minor... Lumian mentally dismissed the matter. As they continued through the market, he turned to Batna and asked, "Do pirates often enter Port Farim in disguise?"
"Yes, frequently," Batna replied without hesitation. "But hunting them here is hardly worth the trouble."
"Why not?" Lumian raised an eyebrow. "It would be easier to collect the bounty on their heads."
Batna chuckled and lowered his voice.
"Port Farim's officials tacitly allow pirates to come here, selling their plundered goods and buying supplies and pleasures in return.
"The pirate trade is a major economic force in Port Farim. Many, including the governor, the local fleet commander, and the garrison head, have amassed wealth through it."
"As long as the pirates keep a low profile, going after them in Farim is like challenging the local power players. If that happens, you and the pirates risk getting caught, but the pirates might find a way to 'jailbreak.'"
"Does Trier not have any objections?" Lumian asked, amused.
Outside Trier, people often referred to the Intis government as Trier.
"Who knows? Maybe those who know about the pirate trade are swimming in wealth from corruption. If they don't, they won't

bother figuring it out," Batna chuckled. "Either way, pirates are pretty chill in Port Farim and prefer avoiding trouble."
"Is that so..." Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "If a pirate attacks me, don't I have the right to defend myself?"
"Yes, but why would they initiate an attack on you?" Batna could sense this guy was trying to provoke the pirates.
"Perhaps they think I'm an easy target?" Lumian replied as he and Batna Comté turned to a nearby bar.
They entered it, choosing to sit inside instead of on the street.
It was equally lively inside, with a mixed-race woman dancing provocatively on the wooden stage at the hall's center. Her moves synchronized with the music, frequently lifting her legs and following the rhythm. Gradually, she shed her jacket and various layers, revealing ample areas of healthy skin and gentle curves.
As she placed her hand on her undergarment, the surrounding patrons responded with whistles and loud cheers, the atmosphere reaching its climax.
"How about this? In some ways, isn't Farim more open-minded than Trier? Not only can you see it, but you can also take it away with a sum of money," Batna remarked with a smile.
Lumian raised his right hand and declared, "This only means that Farim is far enough from the reach of both the Churches and the Trier Avenue du Boulevard."
"What do you mean?" Batna was momentarily taken aback.
Lumian adopted a pious tone, mimicking a devout believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun. "It's too far from justice to be bound by the law!"
Seeing Batna's expression freeze, Lumian smiled again.
"Just kidding! Out at sea, who cares about the law? Might makes right!"
Batna chuckled, relieved. "For a second there, I thought you were about to purify the place in the name of God."
Taking their seats, they ordered the Fog Sea Archipelago's famous sugar liquor, Golden Somme.
Eight licks per glass was much cheaper than a Trier.
As the caramel-sweet liquor warmed his throat, Lumian launched into an enthusiastic conversation about Gehrman Sparrow, acting like a devoted follower. He chatted with Batna and even the bartender, drawing them into his passionate discourse.
After a while, Lumian finished his Golden Somme and stood up, drawn towards the central wooden platform where a new stripper had taken the stage.
Batna watched with a knowing smile. He assumed the lad couldn't resist the allure.

Lumian approached the platform, grabbed two patrons who were blocking his way, and effortlessly tossed them aside. With a powerful push against the platform's edge, he leaped onto the stage.

Under everyone's bewildered gaze, Lumian drew his revolver, aimed it at the bar's ceiling, and fired.

Bang!

Dust rained down, startling the stripper into a crouch. Patrons panicked, scrambling for cover. Some stood frozen in shock, others glared indignantly or frowned, and a few even sported expectant grins.

What is he thinking? What is he doing? Batna was dumbfounded.

Lumian blew on the revolver's muzzle and flashed a grin at the patrons.

"Everyone, may I have your attention. I have something to ask you."

Chapter 517: Prominent Merchant

Lumian ignored the stunned silence that followed his question. A smirk played on his lips as he addressed the group,

"So, where can a fellow find some mystical trinkets around here?"

Upon hearing this question, Batna Comté couldn't help but raise his right hand and finish his remaining Golden Somme.

Where did this punk come from?

How could he ask such a question in public?

Even if nobody reported him, they'd only see him as a fool!

For a moment, Batna regretted accepting Louis Berry's invitation. This fellow would tarnish his reputation by association.

Noticing the odd expressions around the bar, Lumian gave a nonchalant shrug. He holstered his revolver and announced,

"Looks like you're all just ordinary folk, then."

With that, he leaped off the wooden platform, navigating through the startled crowd back to the counter.

The two drunkards he'd thrown out, along with the others who had been frightened by him, measured his strength and weapons, choosing not to retaliate.

Back on his barstool, Lumian ordered a Lanti Proof with a grin at Batna.

"Port Farim is certainly more open than Trier."

Batna studied Louis Berry with an "are you serious?" expression, forcing a smile.

"We must follow Gehrman Sparrow's career, not his actions."

Is this fellow so obsessed with Gehrman Sparrow that he mimics his cold, reckless demeanor?

Gehrman Sparrow, at least, had the strength to back up his madness. *What about you?*

Furthermore, Gehrman Sparrow exudes a cold and indifferent madness, while you are reckless, foolish, and brainless. *How can the two be equal?*

Lumian ignored Batna's jab and turned the conversation to the recent surge in pirate activity in the Fog Sea.

After finishing his Lanti Proof, he bid farewell to Batna and headed out. Walking through the bustling open-air market, he made his way towards the harbor.

Just as Lumian returned to the square plastered with announcements, a sudden jolt sent him whirling around.

A male Islander, sporting a half-top hat and a dusty black jacket, approached hesitantly, a strained smile plastered on his face.

"I saw you at the bar earlier."

"Cut to the chase," Lumian urged impatiently.

The Islander, his brownish-black skin stretched over a lean face, leaned in and lowered his voice.
"Looking for mystical items, are we? I know just the place."
"Really?" Lumian asked in disbelief.
"Can't promise anything, but it's worth a shot. Just don't buy anything if they turn out unsuitable." The Islander's gaze flicked to Lumian's left armpit. "Besides, you're armed and dangerous. Not exactly an easy target for robbery, right?"
"That's true." Lumian contemplated this for a moment, then gave a slow nod. "What's your name?"
"Carmel." The Islander gestured towards a narrow street branching off the square. "Follow me. It's close."
Lumian trailed nonchalantly behind Carmel, their path crossing two streets before they arrived in a district eerily reminiscent of Rue Anarchie.
Crumbling buildings huddled close, new construction jostling for space amidst the narrow road.
Carmel led Lumian into a dimly lit laundry shop, its interior draped with damp clothes. They navigated the maze of hanging garments, arriving finally deep inside the dark room.
There was a door there.
"Disguise yourself first," Carmel instructed, retrieving two hooded black robes from a hook nearby. "Those who dabble in such things prefer to keep their identities secret."
Lumian donned the robe, pulling the hood low over his face. Carmel then rapped on the door in a specific rhythm.
It creaked open, revealing a makeshift living room furnished with an old sofa, threadbare armchairs, and a mismatched assortment of furniture.
Six figures, cloaked in identical robes, sat in various positions, their faces obscured by the shadows.
Lumian politely closed the door behind him as Carmel made a brief introduction.
After the two pulled up a stool and sat down, a man with his hood pulled low leaned forward and whispered,
"I need a Royal Jellyfish's venom crystal. I can offer 5,000 verl d'or."
Silence.
The next participant sold a Strange Sea Eagle eyeball he had procured.
Seeing that their discussion was on point, Lumian stood up and surveyed the gathering.
"I need a Sphinx's brain. Name your price."
The man seeking the Crown Jellyfish's venom crystal's voice was carefully controlled as he replied, "I happen to have one. If you pay

me 30,000 verl d'or, it's yours."
"How can I be sure of its authenticity?" Lumian asked him directly.
The Strange Sea Eagle eyeball seller interjected in a raspy voice, "I can notarize it for you."
"Excellent. Let me take a look at the goods first," Lumian smiled, approaching the seller.
The man replied calmly, "Such a valuable mystical item, you wouldn't expect me to carry it around, would you?
"I'll only bring it to you if you pay a 50% deposit first. It's upstairs. You can follow me and make sure I don't escape. You can even put the deposit with the Notary for safekeeping."
"Very reasonable." Just as Lumian finished speaking, he suddenly lunged at the trader with the speed of a cheetah, a right hook swinging through the air.
Bang!
The man crumpled to the ground, his teeth flying in a spray of blood.
The other participants, including the Notary and Carmel, were momentarily stunned before scrambling for the door.
None of them challenged Lumian's assault, nor attempted to use their powers. Their sole focus was on escape.
Carmel, closest to the exit, flung open the door and bolted.
In an instant, his vision blurred, and he found himself back in the simple living room, alongside two others who had suffered the same fate.
They all looked bewildered, as if witnessing a folktale come alive.
Bang!
A yellow bullet slammed into the exit door.
The hooded figures huddled down, covering their heads with practiced movements.
Lumian spun around, pulled back the trader's hood, and pressed the revolver's muzzle against his forehead.
"Not a bad scam," Lumian said with a smile.
He had orchestrated an impromptu conspiracy, drawing attention with a gunshot in the bar and publicly expressing his need for a mystical item. This allowed him to identify any greedy pirates or local swindlers who might possess knowledge beyond the reach of ordinary citizens, including black market information.
It was also a way to digest the potion.
The seller was a typical Islander, with brownish-black skin, a long face, gentle features, and dark amber eyes.
"I wasn't lying to you!" he insisted anxiously and angrily.
"Really?" Lumian cocked the revolver's hammer.
Before closing the door, Lumian had created a Bottle of Fiction,

setting a condition that only Beyonders could enter.
None of the participants had successfully "escaped," which confirmed the absence of Beyonders.
If you're not a Beyonder, why mention the main ingredient of the Conspirer potion? Just for fun?
The seller trembled and stammered, "I-I'm sorry. We just wanted to scam some money. We-we can't survive otherwise!"
Lumian wasn't interested in their motives. He glanced at the neatly lined-up accomplices and tapped the trader's forehead with the gun's muzzle.
"What's your name?"
"Roddy," the seller replied, swallowing hard.
Another tap to the forehead.
"Where did you hear about the Sphinx brain, Crown Jellyfish's venom crystal, and Notary?"
This information was inaccessible to ordinary people.
"I-I can't say." A sheen of cold sweat appeared on Roddy's forehead.
Confidentiality agreement or other restrictions? Lumian studied Roddy for a few seconds and smiled.
"Then tell me who your master is."
Roddy froze, his eyes widening in fear.
He hadn't expected the other party to be so certain he had a master, that he was someone else's servant.
"Three, two..." Lumian began the countdown.
"It's Sir Morgalla," Roddy blurted out.
"Then take me there," Lumian calmly requested.
Roddy's sweating intensified.
"No, no, I'm Monsieur Fidel's attendant.
"He's the vice president of the Port Farim Joint Chamber of Commerce."
Participating in numerous mysticism gatherings organized by Fidel as an attendant? Although he can't divulge the corresponding information to others, he can use the information he obtained to swindle adventurers? Lumian stood up thoughtfully, dismantled the Bottle of Fiction, and led Carmel and his swindler accomplices out. He interrogated them one by one and confirmed that Roddy was indeed Fidel Guerra's attendant.
One of the vice president of the Port Farim Joint Chamber of Commerce's primary tasks was to assist pirates in handling sensitive and illegal cargo.
...
Port Farim, Quartier des Black Pearls, Governor-General's Office, 16 Rue Coreas.
Lumian patted Roddy, now donned in his red attendant's attire

with gold trimmings and crisp white pants. A smile played on Lumian's lips as he spoke.
"Tell Monsieur Fidel that I'm interested in purchasing some mystical ingredients and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss it further."
"Alright." Roddy yearned to utter a single plea: "If you could kindly remove the revolver from my back, I would be eternally grateful."
Leaning against the weathered wall of a nearby house, Lumian watched as the swindler nervously entered Unit 16, the four-story gray-roofed building adorned with numerous statues.
The moment Roddy stepped inside, escaping the revolver's direct aim, his first instinct was to bury the whole incident and forget it ever happened.
But then he remembered the chilling warning delivered by the man who fired without hesitation: a ten-minute silence from Fidel, and Roddy's true colors as a swindler would be painted loudly across the street.
Should I lie and claim Monsieur Fidel is unavailable? But he doesn't seem easily duped. A drastic reaction could be worse... Roddy, caught in a dilemma, clenched his teeth and rapped on the study door.
Fidel Guerra, a man descended from both Intis and Feynapotter blood, possessed curly black hair that had started to show signs of age, dark brown eyes, and skin darkened by the sun. Though once known for his refined demeanor, time had etched its mark on his face, leaving behind a mane of mottled white hair and prominent wrinkles.
Dressed in a crisp white shirt and a brown vest, he quietly sipped his wine as Roddy, trembling with fear, stammered out their confession. He spoke of their ill intentions, of their attempt to swindle the new adventurer.
As soon as Roddy mentioned Lumian leaping onto the wooden platform, firing a shot to attract attention, and boldly inquiring about obtaining a mystical item, the merchant sighed and interrupted his flustered attendant.
"There's no need to elaborate further. Does he wish to see me now?"

Chapter 518: Merchant's Entrustment

16 Rue Coreas.

Twirling the brim of his golden straw hat, Lumian stopped just outside the office door and met Fidel Guerra's gaze across the desk. Lumian's grin was anything but friendly.

"Made a decision, have you? Faster than I expected."

Fidel Guerra, with his partially Feynapotterian features, turned to Roddy and let out a soft sigh.

"Didn't expect my attendant to be the ringleader of a scam syndicate."

"Maybe the paychecks he receives from you don't quite match the lifestyle he sees on a daily basis," Lumian shot back habitually.

Fidel ignored the jab. He studied Lumian, eyes narrowed.

"So that bar act was all for show? To dupe fools like him?"

"Let's say I'm grateful for their thousand verl d'or donation. Looks like Port Farim's got a bright future for con artists." No shame in his banditry, not a flicker.

Roddy felt a swarm of regret gnaw at his insides.

Fidel nodded and inquired, "What's on your shopping list?"

Lumian, affecting an air of indifference, responded, "I'm in the market for a bottle of Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard's venom."

Isn't it the Sphinx's brain? Roddy, who was listening, was taken aback.

For a moment, he couldn't help but wonder if he was the swindler or the man opposite him.

Clad in a white shirt and brown vest, Fidel contemplated for a moment before offering, "I don't have it in stock, but I can procure it for you. It might take two to three days. As for the price, it varies, usually between 3,000 to 4,000 verl d'or, depending on the seller. Need my assistance in acquiring it?"

"No problem." Lumian, arms slightly spread, replied, "Praise the Sun. You're a gem."

Fidel, suspecting mockery, frowned slightly.

He maintained his composure, stating, "I'm not charitable; I'm a businessman. Why not make a profitable deal? Besides, I find forming connections with adventurers like you beneficial. Given money and resources, certain matters are easier for you to handle."

Fidel, smiling, questioned, "Aren't you concerned about counterfeit goods? How do you confirm authenticity on the spot?"

Lumian, with an approving smile, quipped, "I know you live here. That's assurance enough. The famous merchant Fidel? Gunned down six times in a row for pulling a fast one in a deal worth a

few thousand verl d'or. Not the kind of rep you'd call respectable news."
He left the issue of confirming the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom's authenticity unaddressed.
Fidel maintained his impassive gaze on Lumian before a smirk crossed his face.
"I can't recall the last time someone dared to threaten me like this.
"Interested in knowing what fate befell those who did?"
"Curious if I've got the nerve to make a move now?" Lumian's gaze narrowed a touch. His smile remained, but it chilled the room in an instant.
He met Fidel's gaze without hesitation.
After a while, Fidel sighed without anger and remarked, "Your approach reminds me of someone—the legendary adventurer, Gehrman Sparrow."
"Yes, I'm mimicking him," Lumian admitted candidly.
Fidel chuckled.
"Imitating his madness, then? So, underneath the act, you're a calm, rational, and cunning individual?"
Lumian shook his head, smiling, and replied, "No. If I don't imitate him, I'd be even crazier."
The atmosphere in the study became tense once more.
Fidel, picking up and sipping fragrant black tea from a bone porcelain cup, acknowledged, "You're quite the young firebrand. Your vigor even makes an old man like me a bit envious.
"How about taking on a commission? It can fetch you a hefty sum and earn you fame at sea, akin to Gehrman Sparrow."
Lumian, adjusting his golden straw hat, inquired, "What's the job?"
"Eliminate a pirate, Baronet Black, Class Khizi, captain of the Golden Nepos. The bounty is 65,000 verl d'or," Fidel stated calmly. "He used to be the third mate of the King of Dusk, Bulatov. Left the fleet, turned to plundering on his own. Four months back, he stole a batch of my goods on Saint Tick Island. It's likely sold by now. I don't expect to recover it. I just want him dead. Let everyone know that anyone who touches my goods meets their end."
Lumian, teasingly, asked, "What if it was the King of Dusk who did it?"
Fidel fell into silence.
After a brief pause, Fidel brushed off Lumian's question and continued, "I'll provide you with regular updates on Khizi—his characteristics, strength, ship location, and onshore whereabouts. As a bonus, I'll throw in an extra 25,000 verl d'or as a reward.
"If you manage to take down Khizi, I'll expedite the process to secure the full bounty through my connections and help spread

your reputation. Everything Khizi owns will be yours.
"So, what do you say? Eliminate Khizi, and you'll become one of the most renowned adventurers at sea."
25,000 additional reward and intel support... Lumian thought for a moment and asked with a smile, "How many adventurers have you pitched this to?"
"Seven or eight, all of whom I hold in high regard," Fidel replied candidly. "There's no penalty for failure, as long as you survive."
Inwardly, Lumian mused, So, it doesn't matter whether I accept the mission or not? He nodded.
"Hunting pirates is the duty of every adventurer."
With a verbal agreement established, Fidel reached into a drawer, producing a brown paper envelope, which he tossed to Lumian.
Lumian deftly caught it with one hand, untied the thread, and extracted the information, swiftly flipping through it.
Abruptly, he looked up at Fidel.
"Has Khizi been seen in Port Farim recently?"
"Yes, I'm certain of this intel, though his exact hiding spot is unknown," Fidel replied with a slight nod.
Agreeing to return in two days for updates on both the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom and Baronet Black, Lumian left 16 Rue Coreas and made his way towards the harbor.
Roddy, fearing severe punishment, was surprised when Fidel merely waved him off, instructing, "Go back to your room and reflect."
"Yes, Monsieur Guerra." Roddy, relieved, left the study and ascended the dimly lit stairs to the second floor.
Yet, as he walked, a chill overcame him, and he shivered.
The darkness around him deepened, and in the dim light, something emerged from behind his shadow.
Attempting to cry out for help, Roddy, gripped by terror, found himself forever voiceless.
...
Meanwhile, Lumian didn't head directly back to the Flying Bird. Instead, under the cooling night sky, he strolled towards a street he had recently passed.
There stood a modest cathedral—The Fool's Cathedral.
Having previously spotted The Fool's Sacred Emblem on the bell tower, Lumian had decided to offer a prayer upon his return.
As expected, Mr. Fool's faith seems prevalent at sea. Port Farim, being an Intis colony, boasts several cathedrals. Lumian gazed at the warm light emanating from the cathedral, removed his golden straw hat, and entered.
Inside, Lumian noticed around 20 to 30 individuals, likely

homeless, resting at the edge of the wide hall. Some had tattered blankets, while others relied solely on their clothes for warmth.
The Fog Sea Archipelago wouldn't turn these tramps into ice statues this season, but rain lurked, ready to pour at any time. Finding shelter was a coveted haven for these tramps, and The Fool's cathedral offered solace.
Back in my vagabond days, when brutal weather hit or days without food wore me down, I'd roll the dice in the cathedrals of the two Churches. If the bishop or padre was decent, they'd toss a meal my way and a spot to crash for the night. But come dawn, I had to vanish, or I'd end up in those rotten relief centers... Lumian reminisced, found a seat, and started praying.
The Fool's cathedral embraced silence at night. Now and then, folks strolled in, muttered their prayers, and exited. Some wore merchant garb, others rocked a sailor's look, and a few even emitted a faint pirate vibe, but none disturbed the peaceful aura.
Lumian wasn't sure what to pray for. Back when he'd occasionally drop by the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, he'd just echo bits of scripture in his mind, tossing wishes like coins and hoping for corresponding blessings. *What if they actually came true?*
Now, he knew such rituals were futile, and he had few desires.
Most importantly, Lumian had only heard clerical teachings about The Fool a few times. He couldn't remember much from the Bible except for the eight Angels and Mr. Fool's authority. But did that matter now?
Recounting his journey from leaving Trier to arriving at Port Farim, Lumian's emotions gradually settled into a sense of tranquility.
"May Mr. Fool bless me. May all catastrophes be resolved. May Aurore be resurrected..."
After about fifteen minutes, Lumian concluded his prayer with a simple wish.
As he stood up, a distant rumble echoed. The cathedral's windows rattled, and the building creaked and swayed.
Lumian raised his eyebrows. Amidst the startled tramps, he walked to the door and gazed towards the source of the noise.
Near the governor-general's office, billowing smoke and flames rose into the sky, casting an eerie glow on the surroundings.
Lumian couldn't help but raise his right hand and stroke his chin. He muttered to himself, This shouldn't have anything to do with my arrival, right?
It seemed something significant had occurred in Port Farim.

Chapter 519: One Event A Day

The flames of Quartier des Black Pearls danced in Lumian's eyes, pulling him deep into thought. As a Conspirer, his mind instinctively dissected the possibilities.

The Resistance and civil independence factions were easily ruled out—they had no presence in this archipelago, Intis's first far-flung colony. The religious and cultural genocide, along with the assimilation efforts of successive governments, they had tirelessly worked to make it happen. Emperor Roselle's policies had transformed this place into something akin to Intis's overseas province—loose laws and weak security. The Islanders, having abandoned their original faith, now saw themselves as discriminated citizens in the Intis border regions. This discrimination mirrored the plight of Reemians in the south of Intis and Savoyards in the east. Regardless, Trier's citizens held a universal disdain for all foreigners. However, their vigilance heightened against Islanders notorious for scams and thuggery.

Did the pirate trade spark internal strife, or were Southern Continent organizations, seeking to overthrow colonial rule, deliberately causing trouble in the Fog Sea Archipelago? Perhaps some ambitious individual is following the lead of an evil god.

Lumian's thoughts raced as he noticed a 2.5-meter-tall half-giant emerging from a room beside the cathedral, dressed in a black trench coat and silk top hat.

Addressing the bewildered supplicants and tramps, he assured them, "Don't worry. The Lord will protect everyone.

"Stay here and don't go out. Wait for the riot to subside. There won't be any danger."

"Praise The Fool!" The believers of The Fool Church found solace, pressing their hands to their chests and bowing.

Their expressions softened, conveying a sense of security.

The tramps exchanged glances, but none dared to leave.

In the minds of most Intisians, a cathedral was a safer haven than any government, regardless of the Church it belonged to.

At that moment, golden sunlight descended into the area where the explosion had occurred, accompanied by a series of dense explosions, though not as deafening as before.

It was evident that the governor-general's office and the Beyonders of the two Churches were addressing the anomaly.

Simultaneously, Lumian observed the sky, once illuminated by moonlight and starlight, darkening. Despite no change in the weather, the street outside seemed cloaked in a thin, dark fog.

Ignoring the half-giant bishop's shouts after a moment of

contemplation, Lumian opened the cathedral door of The Fool and stepped out.
The temperature outside had notably dropped, akin to Trier's autumn.
Beneath the gas street lamps' glow, Lumian retraced his steps back to the port.
Suddenly, a swaying figure emerged from a nearby alley.
The figure, clad in a thin shirt and pants with bare feet, had a pale, wrinkled face.
His eyes were more white than brown, and livor mortis covered his exposed skin.
Zombie? Lumian raised his eyebrows.
As the suspected zombie—an old man—staggered towards Quartier des Black Pearls, it seemed to detect a hint of spirituality and blood, abruptly turning to Lumian and emitting an inhuman sound.
Lumian promptly condensed a crimson fireball, nearly white, and sent it hurtling towards the zombie.
Amidst the rumbling explosion, the zombie's head shattered, and its body disintegrated. It met its demise once more.
No more movement.
Is that all you've got? Lumian had originally wondered if he had encountered a more dangerous undead creature.
Pressing on, he formed ten to twenty crimson fireballs above his head, behind him, on his shoulders, and at his sides, allowing them to follow his movements and maintain a relative suspension.
As Lumian rounded a corner, he spotted a young couple screaming in terror and fleeing.
Behind them, a zombie pursued, its dark-red heart and white intestines faintly discernible from numerous gunshot wounds.
A nearly white crimson fireball, unleashed by Lumian, flew past the couple and exploded on the pursuing zombie.
Rumble. The charred corpse scattered in all directions, accompanied by residual flames.
The young couple, halted in surprise, stared at Lumian surrounded by ten to twenty crimson, nearly white fireballs. Confusion and disbelief filled their eyes.
"Are you waiting for death?" Lumian cursed as he advanced. "Take the back street and enter The Fool's cathedral."
"Alright, alright!" The young man and woman responded instinctively, as if facing armed police officers or adventurers.
The fireball was clearly more powerful than a gun!
As the couple entered the street where The Fool's cathedral was

located, Lumian, resembling an envoy of flames, continued towards the port at a moderate pace.
Along the way, he encountered a few more waves of people emerging from bars, open-air markets, and other places, who had encountered zombies.
Lumian didn't say a word. He directed the crimson, nearly white fireballs around him to help them eliminate the revived corpses. Then, he instructed them to hide in the nearest cathedral.
The zombies' pursuit and the intimidation of the fireballs made his words persuasive. No one insisted on finding their own way.
If there were any, Lumian couldn't be bothered.
After several similar encounters, Lumian began to discern a pattern.
These zombies weren't reanimated from the living; they were originally deceased. The entirety of Port Farim's deceased had risen without any discernible cause.
These zombies instinctively headed towards the explosion site, but if they encountered the living on the way, they'd be drawn by both flesh and spirituality, leading them to pursue, kill, and gnaw.
With this understanding, Lumian no longer advised passersby to seek refuge in distant cathedrals. Instead, he directed them to avoid hospitals, graveyards, and similar places, urging them to stay for two to three hours in bustling bars, dance halls, or houses where no recent deaths had occurred.
After a series of halts and advances, Lumian returned to the port and reboarded the Flying Bird. He continued unleashing the crimson, almost white fireballs until only two remained.
Philip, leaning against the ship's rail, kept his eyes fixed on the governor-general's office.
"What happened?" he inquired of Lumian.
"How would I know?" Lumian replied, amused.
Philip swiftly changed the topic.
"Did you come across any anomalies?"
Only then did Lumian briefly recount the explosion near the governor-
general's office and the sudden reanimation of the corpses.
"Zombie summoning?" Philip muttered to himself, a frown creasing his brow.
Without awaiting Lumian's response, he sighed and said, "It was smooth only on the first day of this voyage. On the second day, we encountered Bone Splitter. On the third day, Death Navigators attacked us at noon. By night, or rather in the early hours of the fourth day, another zombie calamity struck in Port Farim... We still have six days until we reach Port Santa..."

Lumian felt a pang of guilt.
In theory, his attraction to or attraction by calamities shouldn't be so frequent. When he was in Trier, he didn't encounter mystical incidents every day. If that were the case, 007 would have died from overwork.
Encountering one or two calamities throughout the journey would be understandable, but considering Dardel's Derangement, it's truly a daily affair... *Could it be that some unclean entity is tailing me? Could it be the cause, the trigger, or the convergence?* And is there essentially only one calamity I've encountered? The more Lumian pondered, the more he felt the urge to correspond with Madam Magician to investigate if there was an underlying issue behind such frequent calamities.
"Perhaps the zombie calamity was triggered by the initial trouble on the ship. Once we leave the Flying Bird, our subsequent journey might become peaceful," Lumian casually consoled Philip.
He didn't hold much confidence in his words.
"Hope so." Philip spread his arms slightly and prayed devoutly. "Praise the Sun!"
Lumian took his time before heading back to the first-class cabin. He lingered by the shipboard, surveying Port Farim.
The authorities' silent endorsement of pirate activities in the Fog Sea Archipelago had resulted in a certain level of chaos and misconduct. However, it had also led to a notable increase in the number of Beyonders compared to regular Intisian cities. Swiftly organizing a resistance, they cleared the streets of zombies, minimizing the casualties among citizens and tourists.
Whether pirates and adventurers exploited the turmoil to commit crimes or settle scores remained uncertain.
In less than half an hour, the turmoil near the explosion site subsided. Official Beyonders dispersed, addressing disturbances on other streets.
"Very good. Nothing major happened. They managed to control it in time," Philip remarked, relieved.
You can say that, but I can't... Lumian laughed self-deprecatingly.
Only then did Philip feel at ease enough for casual conversation.
"Did you go into Farim for a drink?"
"That's right," Lumian replied with a smile. "I happened to receive a commission."
"What commission?" Philip asked casually.
"Hunting a pirate—Baronet Black." Lumian didn't withhold any details.
Philip's eyes narrowed as he inquired with a frown, "Are you sure you're stronger than Baronet Black? He has a ship and over a

hundred subordinates! Besides, even if you find an opportunity to assassinate him, aren't you afraid of the King of Dusk's retaliation? He's one of the maritime kings!"

"Just because I accepted a commission doesn't mean I'll definitely do it. I don't even know where to find Black Baronet Class Khizi. That's his name, right?" Lumian didn't mind the potential repercussions from the King of Dusk.

There were more than one Saint who wanted to deal with him!

Philip observed Louis Berry's nonchalant demeanor, realizing he had accepted a mission but would reconsider only if there was a chance to complete it. Thus, he didn't press further on the matter.

The next morning.

As the security supervisor finished breakfast, a subordinate sailor informed him: The governor-general's office had ordered the port to be temporarily closed, and all ships were prohibited from leaving!

Philip suppressed the urge to stand up and asked in a deep voice, "What are the soldiers at the port doing?"

"Searching ship by ship," the sailor replied truthfully.

In Room 5 of the first-class cabin, Lumian observed the chaotic harbor where the army had entered and continued writing a letter to Jenna and Franca.

"Something seems to have happened to Port Farim on Saint Tick Island in the Fog Sea Archipelago. Ask that person and see if he knows the exact situation."

At this point, Lumian raised his right hand and tapped his chest four times—up, down, left, right—like Mr. K. He whispered sympathetically, "Poor 007."

Chapter 520: Demon Warlock

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 9 Rue Orosai, Apartment 702.

Franca awoke naturally, rising lazily from her bed. Her plans were simple—grabbing a piece of toast, anticipating a heavy lunch.

Lately, the absence of Mirror People leads had made her days relaxed.

Thank the Heavens, thank the Earth, thank Mr. Fool. Lumian, the jinx, has left Trier... Franca muttered in her pre-meal prayer.

As she sipped her milk, Jenna returned and pointed to the coffee table.

"Rabbit Chasel delivered a letter this morning. It's from Lumian."

"Letter?" Franca's eyes narrowed as her relaxed body tensed.

The source of Dardel's Derangement was still at large. *What had happened this time?*

"He mentioned an incident in the capital of the Fog Sea Archipelago. He wishes to gather details and hopes you can inquire with your contact among the authorities. I refrained from waking you since you only reach out to that contact late at night, so I opted to read the letter immediately. It seems you can only make inquiries during the night," Jenna explained concisely.

"How considerate. Lumian, that rascal, would undoubtedly knock on the door and jolt me awake!" Franca, who had experienced Lumian's disruptive wake-
up calls countless times, felt unusually touched.

She chuckled.

"Did something happen to Port Farim once he arrived? Even though it seems unrelated to him, but..."

Franca leaned back slightly and remarked, "What's up with the walking mysticism catastrophe detector?"

Since it wasn't urgent, she planned to ask about 007 in the telegram group later at night. After all, he was an official Beyonder of Trier. It was unlikely he would have immediate information about the events in the Fog Sea Archipelago's capital. If she didn't initiate the inquiry, he might remain unaware.

Franca, with her penchant for instant messaging, set down the bottle of milk and wrote Lumian a teasing reply.

"If you want to know what's happening, investigate it yourself. A walking mysticism catastrophe detector like yourself doesn't need clues or information. Stroll through the streets of Port Farim aimlessly, and who knows, you might bump into the person involved!

"Hey, let's not turn letter-writing into work-related

communication, using it only to discuss issues or ask for help. Can't you share the interesting sea tales and details of pirates' bounties?
"Heh heh, ever since you left Trier, everything's been calm and quiet. I can enjoy sleeping in again. Enjoy your sweet revenge. No need to rush back. Give us a heads up if you need assistance..."
Jenna observed Franca thoughtfully as she gleefully filled nearly two pages of the letter.
...
Inside Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin in Port Farim, Lumian, confined to his quarters, sneered as he finished reading Franca's reply.
How many complaints has this fellow received from 007? She's blaming me for the frequent mysticism catastrophes.
Folding the letter, he brought it to Ludwig's lips.
The boy, who had just finished dessert, looked at Lumian and remarked, "I'm not a shredder."
"I thought you eat everything," Lumian replied casually as he lit the letter, watching it turn to ashes in the sea breeze blowing through the window.
Shortly after lunch, Philip knocked on the door, accompanied by four soldiers in blue military uniforms adorned with golden threads.
The officer, holding copies of Lumian and the others' identification documents, compared their faces to black-and-white photos.
"Like you, they came from Port Gati and only arrived last night?" the officer inquired, having confirmed Philip's reliability.
"Yes, I watched them board the ship. We met frequently in the past two days," Philip replied, wisely choosing not to expose the fact that Lumian and the others' identities and information were fake.
Very wise... Otherwise, you'll witness true trouble... Lumian joked inwardly.
If his disguise were to be exposed, he would choose to "teleport" away with Lugano and Ludwig rather than make a scene and reveal the adventurer Louis Berry to the world. Lumian's only devotion to Gehrman Sparrow, ready to hunt pirates when the opportunity arose. In truth, Lumian had no intention of becoming a true adventurer. His purpose for venturing out to sea was revenge!
After confirming Lumian and the others' situation, the officer led the soldiers to the next room, with Philip accompanying them.
Lumian observed that the investigation of the Flying Bird was thorough, yet not overly intense. The officers followed procedures meticulously without delving into further inquiries.

It made sense. The explosion in Quartier des Black Pearls and the abnormality of the corpses couldn't have occurred overnight. Even if it was an accident, it had been brewing for a while. The extensive impact suggested a prolonged development. Unless the person involved was a demigod, it was nearly impossible for ordinary authorities to trace any demigod-related traces.

This meant the Flying Bird, having arrived in Port Farim only the previous night, likely had no connection to the incident. The focus was on confirming the passengers' identities.

The possibility of a demigod being injured and unable to escape Port Farim was considered, warranting a comprehensive investigation, but there were no suspicious casualties on the Flying Bird.

The officers disembarked after nearly two hours, accompanied by 20 to 30 soldiers. Lumian, now on the deck, approached Philip and inquired, "What happened last night?"

Philip glanced around and lowered his voice.

"I heard from my former colleague that they're searching for Demon Warlock Burman."

"Burman?" Lumian expressed his ignorance.

Having only read a portion of the wanted posters the previous night, Lumian was not familiar with Demon Warlock Burman. His attention had been on maritime kings, pirate admirals, and other significant pirates. Then, he had shared a drink with Batna Comté.

"He's a wanted adventurer," Philip explained with a sigh. "Before I left the Fog Sea fleet, he was still normal. He chased bounties and treasures and met his wife, Helen, a female adventurer. Later, Helen died in an accident, causing Burman to go crazy. He wanted to revive his wife and did many things—both good and bad attempts.

"He mercilessly orchestrated the destruction of a 300-person town to fulfill the conditions for a resurrection ritual. He organized gatherings of evil Warlocks, aiming to use the lives of others, especially newborns, for cruel and bloody witchcraft to revive Helen. These events pushed his bounty to surpass Bone Splitter Basil, reaching 600,000 verl d'or."

In his quest to resurrect his wife, he was driven to become a cruel and cold Demon Warlock? Lumian suddenly sighed.

If Madam Magician hadn't found him back then, if Mr. Fool hadn't offered a glimmer of hope, and if the Tarot Club hadn't arranged for two formidable Psychiatrists to provide treatment, would he now resemble Burman and carry a Demon-prefixed moniker?

Moreover, simply treading the path of boons would expedite his growth. With Termiboros's aid, he could reach Sequence 5 Fate

Appropriator within a few months. The obliteration of a 300-person town held the potential to elevate him to a Circle Inhabitant.
"600,000 verl d'or is nearly on par with Vice Admiral Black Tide Holle Sassen, who has the lowest bounty among pirate admirals," Lumian remarked, drawing a comparison.
Vice Admiral Black Tide was a great pirate who had only gained fame in recent years. His bounty was 700,000 verl d'or.
Philip fell silent for a moment before adding, "Burman might not be weaker than Holle Sassen, but he doesn't have his own fleet. He's always alone and occasionally collaborates with those evil Warlocks. This allows him to escape authorities' encirclements and successfully infiltrate towns adorned with his wanted posters."
From Philip's description, Lumian gathered that Demon Warlock Burman possessed diverse abilities, excelling at disguises.
With the elegance of a true Warlock, Burman combined it with mastery over the power of the dead, whether acquired through resurrection research or inherent in his original Sequence's contradictory description of both "comprehensive" and "specialty skills."
...
The port blockade left the Flying Bird stranded in Farim, delayed from its scheduled departure.
At 4 p.m., Lumian found himself with nothing to do. Sporting his new golden straw hat, he disembarked from the ship, where passengers and sailors could now freely move. Once more, he stepped into Port Farim.
He planned to investigate the scene of last night's explosion. Perhaps he could unearth some clues.
What lay in ruins was a hospital. Nearly half of it crumbled, unveiling a massive pit leading underground. Corpses littered the remaining structures, amidst fresh blood and humanoid shadows charred by the blast.
With the ban lifted, numerous adventurers flocked to the site, seeking answers. Lumian blended into the crowd, discreetly observing.
"Louis, you're here too?" Suddenly, Lumian recognized a familiar voice.
It was Batna Comté, armed with a substantial revolver and an exquisite rapier. Meticulously groomed, he looked sharp and sophisticated.
"That's right," Lumian replied with a smile. "As an adventurer, how can I miss the grand occasion of pursuing the Demon Warlock?"

Our main goal is to gather clues for a reward... Batna muttered under his breath.
As he investigated the battle remnants for leads, he casually inquired, "Did you come across those resurrected corpses last night?"
"I did. Besides being a bit eerie, there's nothing noteworthy about them," Lumian boasted.
Batna glanced at him and suddenly smiled.
"Anything unusual happened to you after leaving the bar last night?"
Lumian replied nonchalantly, "I ran into a few swindlers and walked away with a small fortune."
A small fortune... Batna was taken aback.
He suddenly recalled Louis Berry's actions at the bar and his words: "Perhaps they think I'm an easy target?

Chapter 521: Guidance of Fate?

When Batna turned his gaze back to Lumian, there was a discernible shift in his eyes.

The mimicry of Gehrman Sparrow and the apparent recklessness that characterized this guy seemed all too contrived. Beneath the facade lurked cunning and a hint of sinister intent!

Anyone falling for his act was in for a world of trouble!

Lumian chose not to dwell on how he'd managed to swindle a small fortune out of the swindlers. Instead, together with Batna, he meticulously surveyed the aftermath of the explosion, scrutinizing every detail.

Regrettably, even the official Beyonders, armed with their diverse Sequences and synergistic combinations, were at a loss, let alone the duo lacking any proficiency in divination or prophecy.

Batna absentmindedly ran his fingers over the finely crafted rapier hanging diagonally at his waist, letting out a sigh.

"I know it's a long shot, but I can't resist coming here, wasting my time. It's not about the bounty. What adventurer doesn't dream of overnight fame?"

Hunting down the Demon Warlock Burman wasn't the only route to fame. Assisting official Beyonders in tracking this wanted criminal, whose bounty rivaled that of a pirate admiral, was a noteworthy feat in itself.

"Wasn't your primary motivation to gather clues for the money?" Lumian inquired, a playful smile on his face.

"Uh, well, that's a secondary motive," Batna awkwardly defended himself.

Suddenly, he had a realization.

He never explicitly mentioned that his investigation aimed at accumulating clues for monetary gain. He merely thought about it!

Can he read my thoughts, or is he just bluffing? Batna scrutinized Lumian with a perplexed expression.

Lumian chuckled.

"Don't let your thoughts betray you. If you cross paths with a Spectator, your secrets won't stay hidden."

Batna instinctively lifted his right hand and touched his face.

Is my expression management that bad?

He vented his frustration with a muttered curse, "With the scene in this level of chaos and no traces left on the nearby streets, unless a deity blesses me, or I'm imbued with luck, finding any clues is like searching for a needle in a haystack... How about we grab a drink instead?"

Luck... Finding clues doesn't necessarily hinge on good luck; bad

luck could work just as well... Lumian's heart stirred as he pulled a bandage from his pocket and calmly wrapped it around his eyes.
Batna Comté, utterly bewildered, couldn't help but ask, "What on earth are you doing?"
"Blindfolding. Relying solely on instinct to navigate the nearby streets eliminates external influences and unleashes the full force of luck," Lumian explained with a chuckle. "Perhaps today, luck is truly on my side?"
According to Franca, a mystical catastrophe detector like him didn't need conventional clues or intel; he might just stumble upon the person involved while strolling around.
In that case, Lumian decided to follow the whims of fate this time.
If he succeeded, he could use the Demon Warlock or related clues to claim a handsome bounty. If he failed, it would prove Franca's words to be nothing but baseless slander.
Batna couldn't help but wonder if Louis Berry had lost his mind. "Can you really do that?"
"There's no harm in trying," Lumian replied confidently, blindfolded and ready to step onto the street.
After a few paces, he abruptly halted.
Blindfolding, he realized, was useless for Hunters.
The path he had taken and the scenes he had observed while searching for clues were vividly etched in his mind, meticulously arranged according to their real-world locations.
Essentially, he possessed a high-definition mental map of the surrounding streets, allowing him to reach shops and buildings with uncanny precision.
With a Hunter's exceptional control over their body and direction, even without sight, coupled with heightened senses of smell and hearing, Lumian couldn't help but conclude that relying on the whims of fate was redundant.
After a moment of contemplation, he began to ponder his next move freely.
Demon Warlock Burman's elusive escapes hints at special abilities or possessions granting him such freedom...
Can he "teleport" away like me, alter his appearance and height at will, or perhaps even disguise himself as someone of a different gender?
Despite numerous bloody and cruel experiments, Burman has evaded capture, suggesting conventional methods and thinking wouldn't suffice...
Can I change my mindset and let him take the initiative to appear?
Yes, if we can't find him, we can make him come to us...
His primary concern is resurrecting his wife, Helen. If I can

fabricate a few cases of resurrection or discuss resurrection at certain mysticism gatherings and provide verifiable mysticism knowledge in related domains, this Demon Warlock might very well follow the clues I left behind...
However, this plan faces two challenges. The official Beyonders might have attempted similar schemes, and Burman, being cautious, could see through them. Additionally, the time needed for setup and waiting could be weeks or even months, a luxury I lack in Port Farim... I can only weave the plan gradually into mysticism gatherings and bar conversations, occasionally revealing "secrets" to make it more realistic and my motives less apparent...
Lost in his thoughts, Lumian relied on Batna Comté for occasional support, preventing mishaps during their walk. When Lumian had a complete albeit time-consuming plan, he stopped, removed the bandage covering his eyes, and smiled at Batna.
"Where are we? My intuition says there might be clues about the Demon Warlock hidden here."
"It's a regular street with regular houses. The residents seem wealthy and powerful," Batna replied helplessly.
Lumian finally caught sight of the evening sun.
As Lumian adjusted to the evening sun, his eyes narrowed, and his heart quickened.
Although unfamiliar with many streets in Port Farim, his instinctive journey guided by fate had led him to a familiar place: 16 Rue Coreas!
The adjacent grayish-brown building, adorned with a sculpted outer wall, belonged to Fidel Guerra, the prominent merchant. Lumian had reserved Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom here last night and accepted a commission to hunt down Black Baronet Class Khizi!
"Temiboros, are you behind this?" Lumian's immediate instinct was to question the Inevitability Angel sealed within him.
Termiboros remained silent, leaving Batna, standing beside Lumian, puzzled. He couldn't fathom who Louis Berry was addressing.
If Termiboros didn't intentionally lead me here, then something in Fidel Guerra's house is aligning with my fate. Is it an item related to the Hunter pathway or connected to an evil god? Or could the clues to Demon Warlock Burman's whereabouts truly be found at Fidel's residence? Lumian's mind raced as he rapidly considered a series of possibilities.
Staring at Fidel's building, he evaluated the likelihood of the Demon Warlock's presence.

Burman, engaged in numerous resurrection experiments, likely struggled to complete his preparations alone. Snatching various resources would draw the attention of both official Beyonders and pirates who sought his capture. Only the assistance of other evil Warlocks could provide him with the necessary help.
If a well-connected merchant like Fidel supported him in secret, Burman wouldn't face difficulties obtaining experimental materials...
For Fidel, with a Sequence possibly not high enough, having a Demon Warlock reliant on him for covert protection is undoubtedly advantageous.
Considering Fidel's clandestine business, vulnerable to attacks from powerful pirates or adventurers, having a Demon Warlock at his disposal makes sense.
In case of future conflicts with authorities, the Warlock could shield him, enabling a change of identity and a fresh start in another city or country. According to Aurore's insights, such individuals often maintain fake identities and reserve assets in multiple places...
Last night, soon after I met Fidel, a mishap occurred involving the Demon Warlock's failed experiment...
Lumian averted his gaze. Lumian increasingly suspected that the merchant, Fidel Guerra, had motives to shield Demon Warlock Burman.
Of course, if Termiboros intentionally guided him here, the situation would only become more complex and serious.
"What are you looking at?" Batna inquired, following Lumian's gaze to 16 Rue Coreas.
"I met Fidel Guerra, a prominent merchant, here last night and received a commission from him," Lumian replied candidly.
"What commission?" Batna asked with curiosity.
Lumian responded with a smile, "Hunt the captain of the Golden Nepos, Black Baronet Class Khizi."
"Is the rumor true that Black Baronet Class hijacked Fidel's shipment? Fidel hired numerous adventurers to deal with Black Baronet..." Batna enlightened before lowering his voice. "Don't tell anyone about this."
"Why?" Lumian inquired with a smile.
Batna, stroking his neatly trimmed stubble, whispered, "These bounties and commissions don't necessitate actual acceptance, nor do they require success."
"Yes, if word gets out that an adventurer plans to hunt a pirate, and they're not too far apart, revenge from said pirate is inevitable. It's both a punishment and a warning.

"Baronet Black is a notorious pirate. If he catches wind that a newcomer like you is taking on a mission to hunt him and is spreading the news, do you think he'll take offense? He might track you down and use your demise as a lesson for other adventurers and Fidel."

Baronet Black is indeed in Port Farim... Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

"That's a smart approach."

Smart? Batna was momentarily taken aback.

In the evening, at a bar, Lumian, Batna, and the others had been reveling for nearly two hours, filled with joy and excitement.

Suddenly, Lumian lifted his glass and descended from the barstool to the floor. Addressing the adventurers and ordinary patrons around him, he declared, "Everyone, remember my name, Louis Berry!

"I'm on the brink of fame. I've accepted a commission from the prominent merchant, Fidel. My objective is to track down Black Baronet Class Khizi!

"When I succeed, the name Louis Berry will echo across the Five Seas!

"When that time comes, you'll proudly say you shared a drink with me!"

Ah... Batna froze on the barstool.

It felt like witnessing Louis Berry once again leaping onto the wooden platform and firing his gun the night before.

Chapter 522: Excellent Scheme

Amid the bustling scene, Lumian relished his drink until the clock neared midnight. Exiting the bar with Batna, they stepped onto the street, where the once-warm sea breeze had turned chilly.

Batna hesitated before asking, "Do you seriously plan to go after Baronet Black?"

Hadn't Louis Berry's performance been a repeat of the previous night's scheme, expecting Black Baronet Class Khizi to come looking for him?

Lumian turned his head, his green eyes devoid of any signs of intoxication. "Otherwise? If he doesn't seek me out, where am I supposed to find him? Sneak onto the Golden Nepos and take on their entire ship solo?"

Fair point... Batna conceded that Louis Berry's logic had merit.

Once Black Baronet made land, he would likely disguise himself, making him hard to track. At sea or on his own boat, a lone adventurer would find it nearly impossible to take him down. Even lions feared a wolf pack. Moreover, among the wolves, aside from Class Khizi, there were a few heads with Beyonder powers.

Batna had to admit that every head was no less formidable than himself.

After a brief pause, Batna sensed something amiss and blurted out, "Are you sure you can handle Baronet Black and the two or three helpers he might have?"

Lumian's lips curled into a smile.

"Every adventurer who comes to sea dreams of following in Gehrman Sparrow's great footsteps."

It wasn't the first time he said this, but the tone was different. This time, Batna detected a calm and serious demeanor.

Is he for real?

Is he sly and cunning or just plain reckless?

At that moment, Batna had to reconsider his understanding of Louis Berry.

There was a method to his madness, a trap meticulously laid out, but the aspirations and strategies were impractical. What struck Batna most was that Louis knew it was unrealistic, yet he calmly and persistently pressed on to realize his grand dream.

How to describe this guy? Batna couldn't find the right words.

At that moment, Lumian had already reached the open-air market stalls. He dropped 5 verl d'or on fried banana slices, scones, roasted meat, roasted oysters, grilled fish, roasted shrimp, and sugarcane.

"You're still hungry?" Batna asked, surprised.

During their drinking session, they had already ordered fries, fish,

meatloaf, and more.
Lumian smiled and replied, "Getting supper for my godson."
Godson? At your age? Batna couldn't quite fathom this guy with a Savoie Province accent.
Maybe it's a trend in the mountainous province for young men to become godfathers?
After Lumian picked up the brown paper bags, Batna exhaled and remarked, "Your plan might not be effective. Adventurers boasting about their exploits are a dime a dozen. They might not consider your declaration a joke to spread it to others. It's too common."
Lumian smiled and said, "No, they'll spread it like wildfire. In a few days, the entire Port Farim will know that a new adventurer has taken a commission to hunt down Baronet Black."
"How's that possible? You can't control their mouths," Batna retorted subconsciously.
Suddenly, he was taken aback.
"You can't really... control their thoughts, can you..."
Lumian scoffed and tapped his head with the paper bags.
"Use your brain and think carefully.
"They won't want to spread it. Someone will help me spread it."
Batna had an epiphany.
"You want to secretly hire a group of people to help you publicize this matter..."
He paused for a few seconds before continuing, "There's no need for you to hire them. The merchant, Fidel, will help you achieve your goal once he finds out about your act. He has ample resources. But what if he doesn't know..."
"I'll pay him a visit tomorrow," Lumian replied calmly.
It's meticulous and feasible. It's like iron chains, all interconnected... The more Batna thought about it, the more he realized that every detail of this plan had been considered, but overall, it exuded a sense of madness.
After a while, he instinctively assessed, "If Baronet Black leaves the Fog Sea, it might take months for him to hear the news. If he happens to be in Port Farim, perhaps he'll find out in two or three days."
Port Farim had a population of just over 100,000, including tourists. It might not even be comparable to a quartier in Trier. More people were scattered across Saint Tick Island's plantations and the Andatna Volcano Mines.
"I hope he's in Port Farim," Lumian said with a satisfied expression as he strolled through the night.
Batna fell silent, unsure of what to say.
Returning to the Flying Bird, Lumian entered Room 5 of the first-

class cabin and found Ludwig enjoying the supper he had left for him. He placed the brown paper bags on the dining table.
The aroma of fried ingredients and barbecue filled the air.
Ludwig looked up in surprise before quickly devouring the food Lumian had brought back.
Lumian settled into a nearby recliner, rocking gently.
Finally, Ludwig let out a contented sigh and said, "You get tired of always eating cheese, bread, cakes, and crackers for supper."
A person who can even eat live rats raw doesn't have the right to say that... Lumian criticized and smiled.
"This proves that I haven't forgotten you, my godson.
"By the way, how long do you plan to follow me? I've already helped you escape the Church of Knowledge."
Ludwig pondered seriously.
"I'll follow you until I can earn my own living. N-now, I'm still a child!"
That's true. If this fellow doesn't have the money to buy food, something terrifying might happen... Also, before I go to the City of Exiles, the Church of Knowledge probably won't allow Ludwig to leave me... Lumian laughed self-
deprecatingly.
"I, an unmarried underage man, have to support a child like you for a long time."
Ludwig muttered under his breath, "Not necessarily very long..."
Does that mean you can recover to the point of supporting yourself within this year or next? Lumian pretended not to hear Ludwig's muttering and gestured towards the servants' quarters with his chin.
"Has that guy been acting okay?"
Ludwig, acting as a spy, asked in confusion, "For Intisians, is flirting with women on the deck and in the bar under the pretext of attending to patients considered okay?"
"Yes." Lumian sighed helplessly.
You Intisians.
...
The next afternoon, amid rumors of the port closure possibly ending the following morning, Lumian disembarked from the Flying Bird and headed straight to Rue Coreas in Quartier des Black Pearls to pay an early visit to the prominent merchant, Fidel Guerra.
The previous evening, Lumian had received a letter from Franca, delivered by Jenna's Rabbit Chasel. The explosion in Port Farim matched Philip's intel, but there were more details.
By the time official Beyonders reached the scene, Demon Warlock

Burman had already vanished.
Facing an undead monster made of limbs and corpse fragments, capable of awakening the deceased in Port Farim, official Beyonders had their hands full.
The hospital suffered casualties—patients fell victim to the monstrous horror...
In Fidel Guerra's study, Lumian met the man—a blend of Intis and Feynapotter blood, smoking a cigar with a grin.
"Did you come here because of the smell? I just received the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard venom."
Just obtained? I'm afraid it's been here all along. Considering my earnest efforts to draw out Baronet Black and fulfill your request, you're not suggesting you haven't secured the goods... Lumian ventured a guess, a smile playing on his lips.
"Seems luck's smiling upon me. How much?"
"3,800 verl d'or. My cut isn't much," Fidel replied sincerely.
Lumian didn't negotiate. He produced a stack of banknotes and tallied out 3,800 verl d'or.
Observing this, Fidel signaled an attendant and gave instructions.
Soon after, the attendant returned, carrying a brown glass bottle.
Fidel directed the attendant to take the money and hand over the goods while he kept a distance of roughly ten meters from Lumian. "Metal containers won't do. The venom's potency can be affected by corrosion."
Lumian nodded subtly, casting a glance at the brown glass bottle before stashing it away in his pocket.
After the attendant departed, Fidel grinned once more.
"I heard you replicated your act from the night before at the bar last night?"
This influential merchant showcased his well-informed nature.
"Indeed, we must employ effective strategies repeatedly," Lumian tacitly concurred.
Fidel nodded.
"I appreciate a sharp young man like you. I'll help disseminate your message and ensure Class Khizi hears it promptly.
"Heh heh, the adventurers I assigned to this task previously were far too risk-
averse."
"No problem. That's precisely why I'm here today," Lumian mentioned before making his way to leave.
After a few steps, he abruptly halted, turned around, and spoke thoughtfully, "Do you think Demon Warlock Burman is hiding here?"
Fidel was taken aback.

"What are you talking about?
"What does the Demon Warlock have to do with me?"
"Not much. Just a wild guess," Lumian replied with a smile. "Rue Coreas is very close to where the explosion occurred last night, and your establishment is quite suitable for hiding."
Without waiting for Fidel's response, he took another step and casually exited the building.
Fidel observed Lumian's departure, furrowing his brow in confusion. He couldn't fathom why Lumian had uttered those words.
...
In the deep of night, the sound of waves echoed in the distance, and the Flying Bird swayed gently.
Lumian reclined on the bed in Room 5 of the first-class cabin, enveloped in a velvet blanket. His eyes shut tight, breathing deep, he was sound asleep.
Suddenly, a dark cloud materialized outside the window, obscuring the crimson moon and stars in the sky.
The room, draped in curtains, plunged into darkness. Even looking at one's hands, one could barely discern five fingers.
Within the shadows, something seemed to stir to life.

Chapter 523: Eye of Illusory

A lanky shadow emerged from the shadows in translucent form. Swiftly, it lunged at Lumian, as if eager to claim a new host.

Resembling the possession of Wraiths and evil spirits, this entity sought control but lacked the speed to complete the process in a mere blink.

In an instant, Lumian, previously dormant, transformed into a shadowy figure, melding seamlessly with the darkness, leaving the bed bereft of his presence.

This marked the manifestation of his newly contracted skill—Shadow Transformation!

An eerie hush enveloped the room, dominated by the tall, translucent shadow, erasing any trace of Lumian or his unseen assailant.

Suddenly, the darkness rifted, revealing a decaying, skeletal python oozing yellowish-green pus.

Empty-eyed, its fangless mouth resembled a vortex, emitting a hurried, piercing sound. A suction force tugged at the surrounding shadows, drawing them in.

It seemed like an undead creature, a specialist in consuming shadows and shadowy creatures.

Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin's master bedroom assumed an otherworldly tableau. Despite the lingering dim light, shadows dissipated, leaving everything cloaked in pure darkness.

In due time, Lumian emerged from the shadows, resuming his human form against the backdrop of a lush carpet and an exquisite wardrobe.

Simultaneously, a towering figure materialized—a knight adorned in tattered black armor. Pale flames flickered in its eye sockets, putrid liquid seeping from the armor's crevices, with only sticky flesh clinging to its exposed skin.

With a broadsword raised, the dead knight advanced, slashing at Lumian, as if poised to shatter both bed and wardrobe.

Lumian's agile form shifted, maneuvering from facing the Death Knight, the Shadow-Swallowing Python, and the looming tall, thin shadow to flank them all.

Crash!

The broadsword of the Death Knight cleaved through the wardrobe, sending fragments flying. Lumian, reacting swiftly, crouched down, clenched his fists, and struck the heavy brownish-yellow carpet.

From the center, a multitude of crimson, nearly white flames burst forth, consuming every inch of the room. The inferno

devoured the three undead entities suspected to be from the spirit world.
Rumble!
Within the roaring flames, fireballs materialized and shot out from Lumian's form.
They homed in on the Death Knight, the Shadow-Swallowing Python, and the lanky black shadow, or recklessly engulfed the sizable bedroom.
Rumble!
The crimson, nearly white fireballs detonated consecutively, tearing apart the three undead beings, pulverizing the bed, desk, and other furnishings. Pungent smoke billowed from the scorched carpet.
In this explosive turmoil, any entity lacking pure ethereality or possessing partial corporeality faced inevitable destruction in the confined space. The once steel-clad armor of the Death Knight crumbled instantly, and the Shadow-Swallowing Python fractured into a multitude of burning remains.
Though the lanky shadow fared relatively better, it too succumbed to the engulfing flames, dwindling in substance.
Rumble!
Although the Flying Bird boasted a steel structure, the impact of such force—
reminiscent of multiple cannons targeting a confined space—inevitably took its toll on Room 5 of the first-class cabin. Strangely, only cracks marred the inner wall, with neither the wall nor the door fully giving way.
However, the formless barrier enveloping the area shuddered violently, on the verge of disintegration.
As shockwaves rebounded from the walls, doors, and ceiling, Lumian, the catalyst of the explosion, suffered as well. It was akin to being struck repeatedly by a massive hammer, with his vision clouded by golden specks and a metallic taste of blood in his throat.
The air, instantly devoured by flames, left him with a suffocating sensation.
Amidst the tumultuous flames, a figure emerged from the darkness, standing near the window, adorned in a black robe with a loose hood. Numerous wounds marked his body, testament to the explosive waves and engulfing flames, leaving charred imprints.
Lumian observed that the man's once fine hairs had transformed into pale- white, nearly indistinguishable feathers. Some were charred, emitting a dark dense fog instead of thick smoke.

Rather than the usual red blood, a thick yellowish-green hue oozed from the wounds.
Under the raised hood, Lumian discerned a pale-white face and a few ulcers reaching down to the bone. Vague traces of pale-white fur adorned the wounds.
In the blink of an eye, Lumian locked eyes with his opponent, who sported cold flaxen-colored irises. Between the brows of the hooded figure, a crack swiftly widened, revealing an illusory vertical eye with a deep purple border that almost verged on black. Devoid of eyelashes or pupils, it seemed to harbor countless pale-white patterns.
This peculiar vertical eye instantly mirrored Lumian's figure.
His initial intention to "teleport" behind the hooded man and employ the Spell of Harrumph met an abrupt freeze.
The impact resonated at the spiritual level.
It was akin to Lumian's Soul Body losing the protective shield of his physical form and standing exposed to scorching sunlight. Instinctively, fear, stiffness, and lethargy gripped him.
Ordinarily, humans explored the spirit world through Astral Projection, rarely detaching their Soul Body—the core of their soul—from their physical being, always shrouded in protection.
The Arbiter pathway's Psychic Piercing bypassed the physical body, Ether Body, Astral Projection, and Body of Heart and Mind, directly influencing the Soul Body. It carried an almost undefendable reputation, affecting individuals to varying degrees.
Lumian suspected that the Spell of Harrumph shared these characteristics.
Within the assailant's dark-purple, nearly black vertical eye, pale-white patterns silently spun, as if seeking the essence of Lumian's Spirit Body.
The sensation resembled being scrutinized by penetrating rays of light, causing Lumian's Spirit Body to quiver slightly, impeding intricate thoughts.
Just as he was about to take the simplest action of sinking his consciousness into the Blood Emperor mark on his right hand, the hooded man emitted a sudden pained groan.
His head snapped back as if struck by a bullet, the once illusory, dark-purple vertical eye now blurry, oozing dark-red blood mixed with yellowish-green pus.
With a pained groan, the hooded figure swiftly turned and soared out of the window, dragged by an unseen force.
Observing this, Lumian didn't hasten to block the escape with Spirit World Traversal. Instead, he raised his right hand and snapped his fingers.

Boom!
At the window, a crimson, almost blinding light erupted, and a violent explosion engulfed the hooded man.
Lumian had set this as a trap.
Before entering a state of "sleep," he had concealed the master bedroom within the Bottle of Fiction. There were two entrances, one by the window and the other by the door, accessible only to beings with superpowers. Both exits harbored delayed explosion fireballs.
Any trigger would unleash devastation.
Amidst the fiery explosion, the hooded man was propelled off his feet, crashing against the window frame. His limbs seemed on the brink of tearing from his body.
Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian "teleported" to the severely injured and unconscious man, harrumphing at his foe.
Two beams of white light shot forth, striking the target and rendering him completely unconscious.
As Lumian prepared for his next move, pairs of arms suddenly emerged from the darkness at the shattered exit of the Bottle of Fiction.
Some were covered in warts, some decayed to the point of pus overflowing, and some only displayed blackened bones...
These arms seized the hooded man's clothes and dragged him into the shadows, disappearing without a trace.
Observing this, Lumian refrained from an immediate transformation into a shadow creature to pursue them. Instead, he stood his ground, a slight frown creasing his brows.
The assailant shared an uncanny resemblance to Demon Warlock Burman as depicted on the wanted posters, but the non-human feeling was even more pronounced. The details suggested an undying monster rather than a human.
Lumian wasn't caught off guard by Demon Warlock Burman's appearance. It was one of the anticipated outcomes.
He had deliberately voiced suspicions about Fidel's connection with the Demon Warlock in front of him without providing clarity, fostering the illusion that Louis Berry, a bold adventurer with a penchant for conspiracies, was attempting to extort money from the prominent merchant.
Under normal circumstances, even if Fidel had something to hide, he wouldn't act so swiftly. He would likely observe closely for a few days to confirm the situation. Lumian, however, had "offered" him an opportunity this time.
Louis Berry, the adventurer, had made public the commission he accepted to lure out Baronet Black!

In such a scenario, it wouldn't raise eyebrows if he were killed by Class Khizi.
The death of an overconfident individual in Port Farim wouldn't spark trouble or suspicion.
So, why not nip the danger in the bud?
Even if Louis Berry's suspicions lacked evidence, they would still draw the attention of official Beyonders.
Lumian's "performance" at the bar the previous night seemed to bait Black Baronet Class Khizi, but in reality, it was bait for the merchant, Fidel Guerra!
If Fidel had no ties to the Demon Warlock, it wouldn't trigger an additional reaction. Lumian merely needed to pursue the superficial purpose of hunting Black Baronet. If there was a connection, he would promptly receive a "response."
To Lumian's surprise, the abilities exhibited by Demon Warlock Burman shared similarities with the few divine pathways he knew, but there were also notable differences!

Chapter 524: Infighting

The illusory eye between the Demon Warlock's brows bore a remarkable resemblance to the Eye of Mystery Prying from the Warlock pathway. However, this entity took a unique form, manifesting as a vertical eye rather than the typical manifestation within the eye itself. Lumian had never encountered or heard of such a phenomenon before.

While a Mystery Pryer might experience similar abnormalities as a High-

Sequence Beyonder, it was clear that Burman hadn't reached the Saint level. Otherwise, Lumian would have been the one fleeing, not him. In such a scenario, Lumian might not have been able to escape even if he desired; his only hope would be that the residual aura of the Blood Emperor could momentarily distract Burman, enabling him to "teleport" away.

Considering the authorities' wanted poster, information from 007, and details gathered from Philip and others, Lumian had long concluded that a Demon Warlock like Burman couldn't be a Sequence 4—he certainly wasn't audacious enough to hunt a demigod.

Based on the illusory vertical eye and Burman's diverse, comprehensive abilities, Lumian sensed a true alignment with the characteristics of a Warlock. However, no Warlock's Eye of Mystery Prying resembled this. Not only did it grow between the brows and become a vertical eye, marked with pale-white patterns against a nearly black background, but it also possessed the ability to intimidate others' Spirit Bodies, revealing a perceived "truth."

In that moment, Lumian felt as if he had been stripped of all externalities, leaving only his Spirit Body to resist Burman's. Yielding or failing would result in fainting or enslavement.

Fortunately, the "truth" on him was beyond the perception of Low- to Mid-

Sequence Beyonders, and Burman was no exception. Before Lumian could activate the Blood Emperor's residual aura, the Demon Warlock suffered a backlash, nearly incapacitating him.

Moreover, Burman's command over the undead and the protection he received after fainting surpassed typical Warlock capabilities. Even if others could achieve similar effects with learned or invented spells, it wouldn't be to that extent, let alone so effortlessly.

Which evil god's pathway is this? Or has Burman, a Warlock, been corrupted and acquired abnormal traits? That would explain the non-human details on him. After conducting so many resurrection

experiments, he wouldn't lack the kind that sacrifices to evil gods...
The illusory vertical eye was undeniably powerful and bizarre. I couldn't withstand it head-on. Were it not for the protection of Mr. Fool's seal, Termiboros, and the lingering aura of the Blood Emperor—all surpassing my current level—I might have met my demise at Burman's hands. Lumian's thoughts raced as he quickly made a guess.
Seizing this moment to counteract the impact of the explosion, he retrieved the golden straw hat from his Traveler's Bag and placed it on his head before disappearing.
Lumian "teleported" to 16 Rue Coreas, the entrance of Fidel Guerra's opulent residence.
While Demon Warlock Burman had the means to escape, the same couldn't be said for this prominent merchant!
If Burman had been in good condition when he fled, Lumian worried that he might return out of professional courtesy and rescue his employer. However, since Burman had been rendered unconscious and taken away by some undead creature, he wouldn't be returning to 16 Rue Coreas. He wouldn't even after waking up either. The more time passed, the more likely Fidel Guerra's house would become a trap for the Demon Warlock.
Hence, Lumian still had time to ponder Burman's Sequence and the non-
human issues he exhibited.
His deliberate delay served a purpose.
If Demon Warlock Burman were to wake up promptly and flee with his employer, Lumian's calculated delay of a minute or two would ensnare both of them.
Standing at the entrance of 16 Rue Coreas, Lumian's brow furrowed slightly.
As a Hunter, he detected a faint scent of blood emanating from inside the house.
After a moment of consideration, Lumian gently pushed open the dark-blue door.
It was unlocked.
The door bore splatters of fresh blood that hadn't fully congealed. It seemed as though someone in a panic had sought refuge here, unlocking the door just before being pursued and torn to pieces.
However, there were no remnants of the corpse to be found.
Lumian halted at the doorway, listening intently. The entire house remained eerily silent.
Did Fidel act swiftly, eliminating those in the know and relocating to safety before Burman could strike me down?

In such a scenario, if Burman's operation proved successful and he uncovered the reasons for my suspicions and if there were others privy to the information, Fidel could use the pretext of a late-night attack by Black Baronet and other pirates, where he nearly lost his life. Escaping wouldn't have been easy before returning here. Alternatively, he might vanish forever, adopting a new identity to embark on a fresh business venture... Lumian pondered this mystery as he navigated past the blood-stained area at the entrance, intending to search the house for clues. His goal was to uncover the exact relationship between Fidel Guerra and Demon Warlock Burman.

Leaving the door slightly ajar, he proceeded towards the staircase, the scent of blood lingering in the air.

Perhaps sensing his approach, heavy footsteps suddenly echoed.

Amidst the rhythmic sounds of footsteps, a figure emerged from the basement, coming into Lumian's line of sight.

It wasn't human, or rather, it couldn't be deemed human any longer.

Standing three to four meters tall, its body comprised fragments from various human corpses. It possessed a mix of feminine curves and masculine traits, sewn together by linen threads, with blood-stained mucus dripping from the joints.

This "person" featured a relatively intact head, with only one source—Fidel Guerra, a mixed-blood Intis and Feynapotter.

The merchant's head didn't align with the body; it was as if a child's head had been placed on a half-giant's neck. Dark brown eyes, vacant yet still filled with fear and confusion, stared out.

Dead? Fidel is dead? Did he turn himself into a monster? Lumian pondered. Just as this thought crossed his mind, the stitched corpse lunged forward, dragging three human leg bones that seemed fused together.

A pale-white flame ignited on the colossal "bone sword."

Lumian's eyes narrowed, and his body abruptly vanished, reappearing instantly behind the massive stitched corpse.

"Ha!"

He opened his mouth and emitted a pale-yellow light.

However, the light struck Fidel's head, failing to disorient him, let alone render him unconscious.

It became apparent that the undead creature was immune to the Spell of Harrumph!

Almost simultaneously, the rapidly running sutured corpse forcefully pivoted, emitting a muffled sound from its throat—a language Lumian didn't understand or a word carrying magical effects.

Lumian's soul trembled, as if cowed by evil and death.
He momentarily froze.
The sutured corpse turned around, advancing with purpose. It raised the colossal "bone sword," burning with pale-white flames, and slashed at Lumian's head.
Lumian, experienced in such situations, mostly stemming from encounters with high-level entities, found the current threat less severe than the consequences of the Demon Warlock's illusory vertical eye.
Just in time, Lumian "woke up," activating the black mark on his right shoulder.
Amidst the howling wind, the colossal "bone sword," engulfed in pale-white flames, struck the afterimage left behind.
This time, Lumian materialized close to the stitched corpse's back, stabbing the Symphony of Hatred retrieved from his Traveler's Bag into it.
With a pfft, the pitch-black bone flute, seemingly fragile, plunged into the stitched corpse's flesh.
The flaxen threads burst open, and chunks of flesh and blood peeled off, revealing a dark-red heart emitting pale-white flames.
Lumian extended his left hand, pressing it against the near-fatal wound. The crimson fireball, nearly white, compressed layer by layer as it was pushed in.
Utilizing the reactive force, Lumian abruptly flew backward, dodging the massive "bone sword" that slashed at him.
Rumble!
In midair, he witnessed crimson, nearly white flames erupt from the sutured corpse, tearing apart the beating heart.
Rumble!
The sutured corpse disintegrated, and the flesh and blood of various humans scattered on the ground.
Bang! Fidel's head landed in a pile of flesh and blood, the blankness giving way to a pained expression.
"Who turned you into this?" Lumian inquired, glancing out the window, sensing that the explosion would likely draw the attention of the patrolling police.
Fidel's head opened its mouth, words muffled and filled with hatred.
"It's—it's Burman!"
"Burman?" Lumian was taken aback. "Were you infighting?"
Fidel's head throbbed with pain as his voice trailed off.
"I thought you were testing me. I wanted to observe for a few more days, b-
but he couldn't wait. He w-wanted to kill you tonight. I didn't

agree, and he killed everyone in the house...
"H-he's a true lunatic!"
At this point, Fidel's head lolled, his eyes closed, and he fell silent.
Demon Warlock Burman's mental state is quite problematic... Lumian thought. Is that why he killed his employer's entire household? If he really wanted to kill me, he could have acted alone... Lumian had previously considered whether Fidel would think he was baiting him. For this reason, he deliberately created the illusion that he was baiting Black Baronet to lull Fidel. As for the effect, Lumian didn't care too much. If Fidel didn't take the bait, he would use another method. "Fishing" wasn't the only method in his arsenal.
Unexpectedly, this triggered infighting between Fidel and Burman.
Lumian believed even he couldn't bring himself to do such a thing when his psychological problems were at their worst. That was unless Fidel provoked him, such as pointing out that only a lunatic would believe in resurrection.
Observing the corpse fragments for a while, Lumian noticed no signs of a Beyonder characteristic emerging.
Curse my luck. Burman must have taken it. He shook his head and walked towards the room where the safe might be.

Chapter 525: Repair Fee

Lumian wasn't sure if he should attribute the misfortune of Demon Warlock Burman taking the banknotes, coins, and gold from the safe to the Symphony of Hatred. After all, he hadn't arrived at 16 Rue Coreas and hadn't utilized General Philip's blackened bone flute. Its abilities likely weren't potent enough to rewind the past.

However, Fidel, living up to his title as a prominent merchant, had numerous wallets stashed in various clothes. Lumian conducted a quick search, revealing a total of 30,000 verl d'or.

This provided a modicum of relief for his "psychological injury."

Upon hearing the arrival of a carriage outside, Lumian left Fidel's bedroom and turned to the adjacent room. He suspected it was the patrolling constables here to investigate the recent explosion.

The room was clean and tidy, yet a faint, uncomfortable smell lingered—the stench of decaying corpses.

Entering the room felt like stepping into a catacomb, surrounded by the marks of his own kind and their deaths, creating an uneasy atmosphere.

This should be Demon Warlock Burman's room. It allows him to protect Fidel in the shortest time possible, heh heh, but he ultimately killed him... This story tells us that the most important condition for choosing a bodyguard is mental stability... Lumian mused as he surveyed every corner of the room.

At that moment, the constables had already pushed open the house's door, revealing spilled blood and scattered flesh.

One of them swiftly drew his revolver, while the other blew a whistle, producing a piercing sound.

Lumian's gaze focused on the blackened marks in the room. The blood, suspected to be old, emitted a sinister aura.

"Burman once killed a special creature in this room to complete a resurrection experiment?" Lumian muttered to himself.

He didn't assume it was Demon Warlock Burman's blood because he believed that the other party wouldn't leave behind such a crucial item when he had enough time.

If a Beyonder skilled in curses obtained it, Burman would be in grave danger unless he had a way to sever the connection in advance.

In contrast, Burman's blood and flesh were more likely to be found in the master bedroom of Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin. The Demon Warlock had suffered severe injuries from the explosion and the flames.

Of course, the blanket explosion and subsequent intense

combustion might have rendered the ingredients for cursing inactive.
Lumian crouched down and retrieved a glass bottle from his Traveler's Bag. He scraped away the black marks on the wall and stored them inside.
After completing his task, Lumian cleared any potential traces—hair, skin, and other items. He activated the black mark on his right shoulder and vanished from 16 Rue Coreas before more constables and official Beyonders arrived.
Upon returning to the Flying Bird, he immediately inspected the previous battlefield, now reduced to ruins, scattered with charred and shattered remnants. Metal walls bore marks of distortions and minor cracks, remnants of the intense encounter.
The lingering gasses from the burning carpet and items slowly dissipated through the open window.
After Burman triggered the trap at the exit, the Bottle of Fiction had dissipated.
Lumian focused on examining the windowsill, finding charred remnants.
Phew... Exhaling deeply, he departed Room 5 of the first-class cabin, descending to the deck.
Philip, the security supervisor, leaned against the shipboard, gazing at the night view.
Where's your lover?" Lumian approached Philip, resting his hands on the shipboard.
Philip sighed and replied, "Her destination is Port Farim. Apparently, she was heading to a relative's plantation to assist them."
"Something to celebrate. This means you'll have a new lover," Lumian said, adopting the tone of a Dandyism believer.
"Please allow me to be downcast for another two days," Philip responded, not objecting to Lumian's words but emphasizing his invested feelings.
Of course, it was just a little.
"Did you just return from the port? Why didn't I see you board the ship?" Philip inquired, following his professional instincts.
"I've been in my room the whole time. There was a minor accident at the party just now that set the master bedroom ablaze. Many things were burned. Get someone to fix it promptly tomorrow," Lumian explained, seeking Philip's assistance in resolving the situation. Despite the possibility of staying in the fire-damaged room, Lumian preferred to take action to rectify the situation.
Philip appeared confused. "Party... Ablaze... What did you do in the room? I didn't hear anything..."

Lumian grinned and responded, "A passionate guest made an appearance. Their actions were a bit extreme."
"Really?" Philip inquired subconsciously.
"No," Lumian admitted straightforwardly. "Do you want to hear the real reason?"
Philip fell silent. After a few seconds, he said, "There's a need for compensation for such damage. We'll charge you the repair fee.
"Fortunately, we're still in Port Farim. We can replenish various items immediately. Otherwise, it would have been quite troublesome."
Lumian handed over a stack of banknotes.
"This is the repair fee. I hope it can be completed by tomorrow. If it's too much, consider it a tip. If it's too little, ask me for more."
Philip took the money, frowning as he weighed the stack of banknotes.
"What did you do to the bedroom?"
Why is he giving so much for the repairs?
Is this hush money?
Lumian smiled, turned around, and returned to Room 5 of the first-class cabin.
Observing him disappear through the cabin entrance, Philip counted the stack of banknotes under the crimson moonlight and the gas street lamps at the port.
"2,000 verl d'or? Did he blow up that room?" Philip was shocked and suspicious.
But I didn't hear anything...
That night, Lumian slept in a recliner in the living room.
Initially planning to summon Jenna's Rabbit Chasel and write Franca a letter about the Demon Warlock, seeking her help with Magic Mirror Divination to identify the source of the old blood in Burman's room. However, he remembered that Franca might still be awake while Jenna was already asleep.
Patiently waiting until the morning, Lumian set up the ritual using "Rabbit-
shaped spirit that wanders about the unfounded, a runner who pursues knowledge, a messenger that belongs solely to the Seven of Cups" to summon the book-holding transparent creature resembling a rabbit with powerful legs.
Today's Rabbit Chasel, unlike the last time, wore a pair of indistinct gold-
rimmed glasses.
Handing the letter and the glass bottle containing the blood and powder to Rabbit Chasel, Lumian asked curiously, "Why are you suddenly wearing glasses? Is this the downside of knowledge?"

Behind the gold-rimmed glasses, Rabbit Chasel's eyes glinted sharply.
"No, I learned this from a novel given by the Seven of Cups."
"What novel did she give you?" Lumian inquired, having a hunch.
"The last time I helped you deliver a letter to her, she didn't have any other books with her, so she could only lend me one of her newly purchased collections." Rabbit Chasel adjusted its gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of its nose. "That novel is called 'The Adventurer 1: First Show of Strength.'"
As expected, Lumian thought. So, that's why you learned to wear glasses? He didn't know how to comment on this matter.
After Rabbit Chasel left, Ludwig and Lugano woke up one after another,
with the former casting a glance at Lumian's bedroom before eating his pre-
breakfast snacks. Lugano, however, seemed puzzled.
"Was there a fire last night?"
Why don't I know?
Lumian chuckled.
"It happened while you were engrossed with a certain lady. I quickly resolved it."
"Is that so..." Lugano reined in his disbelief.
Choosing to explore local delicacies in Port Farim rather than enjoying the ship's breakfast, Lumian disembarked.
Shortly after, Philip, the security supervisor, arrived with a dining cart.
Standing in the doorway of the charred bedroom, Philip was stunned.
You call this a minor accident?
Even if it was blasted by cannons, it couldn't be in a worse state, right?
Was he planning to dismantle the entire ship?
Uh, such destructive power actually didn't affect the room's exterior. Even the damage to the walls is within repairable limits...
I didn't hear anything either...
What had Louis Berry done in the room last night?
No wonder he gave 2,000 verl d'or!
At that instant, Philip's blood surged into his brain.
...
In the Sun Square open-air market of Port Farim, Lumian enjoyed a tortilla filled with various fruit cubes and sipped a peculiar coffee laced with salt as he leisurely strolled through the stalls.
Occasionally, he treated himself to a roasted sausage, relishing the sizzling, oily delicacy.

Approaching the end of the open-air market, he encountered Batna Comté.
The well-dressed adventurer's eyes lit up as he approached Lumian and whispered, "Something happened to your employer!"
Curious, Lumian inquired, "What happened?"
He wanted to know how the official Beyonders had publicized this matter.
"It's that Demon Warlock. He killed Fidel's family and all his servants!" Batna's relief was evident; he hadn't been present yesterday and was glad to have avoided potential danger.
The evidence does seem to point toward the Demon Warlock... The authorities must have shared all the details... Lumian smiled at Batna and remarked, "So, everyone at 16 Rue Coreas fell victim to the Demon Warlock?"
"Yes," Batna confirmed with a solemn nod.
Lumian glanced at him and joked, "Remember how I blindfolded myself yesterday, hoping fate would guide me to uncover clues left behind by a Demon Warlock? Do you recall where we ended up?"
Batna was momentarily taken aback before muttering, "16 Rue Coreas..."
Suddenly, he looked up at Lumian in shock and fear.

Chapter 526: Resolution

Batna exclaimed in surprise, "Your blindfolded walk that day was quite effective..."

The destination was Demon Warlock Burman's next target!

Without waiting for Lumian's response, the adventurer mumbled to himself in puzzlement, "Are you a Blessed of luck?"

No, a Blessed of calamity... Lumian replied inwardly.

As thoughts raced, Batna suddenly formulated a new hypothesis.

Could this be Demon Warlock Burman himself?

He had investigated the explosion scene, returning to flaunt his prowess at the crime scene and blindfolded himself to randomly choose the next victim!

Such an explanation seemed far more plausible than being blessed with luck!

Lumian glanced at Batna's Batna's tense expression and smiled.

"Don't tell me you think I'm Burman? How long have I been in Port Farim?"

That's exactly it. Something happened the night you first arrived in Port Farim... Batna didn't dare vocalize it.

"When the Quartier des Black Pearls exploded, I was still praying in the cathedral," Lumian said with amusement, providing an alibi.

Batna pondered for a moment and relaxed, but confusion still lingered on his face.

Lumian sighed and inquired, "Yesterday, I didn't expect to encounter anything related to the Demon Warlock while walking blindfolded. I just found it fun."

He spoke the truth.

However, he couldn't shake the suspicion that the corruption caused by 0-01 might be more severe than he had imagined.

Of course, he couldn't rule out the possibility that Trier, a seal from the Fourth Epoch, had effectively suppressed the preexisting issues within him.

The excuse of finding it "fun" barely convinced Batna. He felt that Louis Berry was undoubtedly such a person.

Yet, the other party would sporadically set traps just for the amusement of it. Anyone treating him as an idiot would end up becoming one!

"Perhaps I was truly blessed by luck yesterday," Lumian concluded.

He then recounted his hypothesis about the Demon Warlock's connection with Fidel and expressed regret, "Unfortunately, I didn't believe I'm that lucky."

Lumian's reasoning convinced Batna that Demon Warlock Burman's continuous evasion and access to resources stemmed

from his close symbiotic relationship with Fidel, a prominent merchant. The subsequent tragedy likely resulted from the pressure exerted by the official Beyonders' investigation, leading to internal strife.
This ruled out the possibility that Louis Berry was a Demon Warlock. He had just arrived in Port Farim a few days ago, and Burman had been here for a long time.
"What a shame..." Batna sighed. "If I had sold the clues about the Demon Warlock's close connection to Fidel to the authorities beforehand, I could've bagged a hefty bounty."
It would've been at least 5,000 verl d'or!
Batna shook his head.
"No, without evidence, the authorities won't buy it. Can't tell them we stumbled on clues blindfolded, blessed by luck. They'd just cuff us for being fraudsters."
A chuckle slipped from Lumian's lips.
"Can't you fabricate some evidence to back the clues?
"Say you spotted someone suspicious at Fidel's back door, maybe the Demon Warlock. Let the official Beyonders confirm it themselves. They'll uncover the truth in due time."
"T-That'd work?" Batna's mouth hung slightly agape.
"Why not?" Lumian grinned. "If you truly found the Demon Warlock, tell them not to sweat the details. Just ask if the clues are legit and if they helped capture the Demon Warlock. If they miss Burman, it's a small scam at worst. Few days of hard labor for you."
"Official Beyonders can take tips from adventurers without solid certainty, right? They'd miss genuine info otherwise."
Lumian's words left Batna silent momentarily before he blurted out, "Don't tell me you've got Islander blood?"
Deception seemed to be his forte.
Lumian casually replied, "Knew an Islander in Trier, quite the con artist with rich experience and techniques."
With a flicker of interest, Lumian raised his left hand, pinching his left eye socket.
Glancing at Batna, he asked, "How long have you been adventuring? Why still so green?"
"Over a year," Batna defended himself. "It's just that I stick to the rules with authorities. I'm more adaptable when dealing with pirates and others."
"Adventurers slipping clues to authorities also dabble in deceit, right?" Lumian grinned. "They scam if they can."
He suspected Batna's strict adherence to rules came from a well-bred background, a notion confirmed by the other party's attire

and appearance.
Observing Batna's silence, Lumian finished his remaining salted coffee and glanced back at the lively open-air market.
"Try not to go to the morgue, cemetery, or other places for the time being."
Just as Batna was about to ask why, he instantly grasped the advice's true meaning.
Without Fidel to provide resources, the Demon Warlock might feel compelled to take action!
...
At noon, Lumian returned to Room 5 of the Flying Bird's first-class cabin. He noticed the master bedroom had undergone a transformation with a change in carpet, bed, wardrobe, desk, and other furniture, replaced by various ornaments. However, the distortions and cracks in the metal walls had only been partially repaired, not fully restored.
Before long, his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, emerged from the void and handed him a letter.
Franca:
"Based on your latest account and my discussion with 007 last night, I suspect that Demon Warlock Burman had been compelled to switch Sequences.
"He was originally a Warlock, but to revive his wife, he switched to the neighboring Death pathway. He went half-mad, becoming half-human and half-monster.
"Though this could be explained as a Warlock receiving an evil god's boon, your situation doesn't align. No cases of Beyonder powers from two pathways fusing and mutating have been documented. This was evident in your clash with Burman. The Eye of Illusory you mentioned has the Eye of Mystery Prying, revealing the side of reality, but it also displays the Death pathway's suppression of the Spirit Body or even enslavement.
"As far as I know, the Death pathway gains an Eye of Death ability at Sequence 8 Gravedigger. Did it fuse with the Eye of Mystery Prying, forming that distinctive Eye of Illusory?"
As Lumian read, he suddenly recalled the appearance of the Eye of Illusory.
Embedded vertically in his forehead, illusory and blurry, a deep purple bordering on black, with numerous pale-white patterns—undeniably a fusion of the Eye of Mystery Prying and the Death pathway's abilities.
Lumian's gaze shifted downward as he continued reading.
"White feather-like fur, decaying wounds, control over various undead creatures, unstable emotional states, and extreme actions

—all indirectly confirming my hypothesis...
"The origins of the old blood are rather peculiar. I've conducted Magic Mirror Divination several times and consulted various entities, but all I've gleaned is that it stems from the depths of the spirit world. No further information. It seems the irreversible half-mad Burman had some other fortuitous encounter."
Unstable emotions... Extreme actions... irreversible half-madness... Lumian mulled over the descriptions and let out an inaudible sigh.
How determined and desperate must Burman have been when he chose to consume the Death pathway potion?
Wild Beyonders didn't know they could switch to neighboring pathways at a specific Sequence. They believed once a divine pathway was chosen, it couldn't be altered. Forced consumption of potions from other pathways led to madness or death.
Moreover, Mystery Pryer and Death weren't adjacent pathways that allowed switching.
Burman wouldn't have drunk the Death pathway potion without a resolve bordering on death, all to revive his wife, even at the cost of his sanity.
Lumian sensed he might have made the same choice in such a situation, hence his conflicting emotions.
Franca's letter ended with reassurance: "Don't fret over the aftermath. Burman's mental state will soon cause him to resurface without Fidel's support and restraint. He might succeed once or twice in gathering materials for experiments, but it won't last. Official Beyonders will eliminate him within weeks or even days."
Lumian glanced at Penitent Baynfel, yet to depart.
"Help me deliver my reply to the sender."
Swiftly, he penned a line: "I'll kill Burman as soon as possible."
Before long, Penitent Baynfel returned with Franca's reply: "Why?"
Lumian wrote on the same piece of paper: "I wish to punish him for his crimes..."
He paused for a moment before continuing, "And end his pain."
Folding the letter into a square, Lumian handed it to Baynfel and glanced at the messenger.
"Don't you find it troublesome to send letters back and forth?"
It wasn't concern but puzzlement.
After delivering the letter, Penitent Baynfel didn't leave immediately. Instead, he waited for a potential reply.
This time, Baynfel didn't remain silent. He replied in a deep voice, "Being busy makes me feel better. It's better to have something to do than always watch the darkness."

Lumian listened quietly without responding, watching Penitent Baynfel turn and walk into the void.
He empathized with those words.
Franca didn't stop Lumian. Her reply was concise and forceful: "Be careful!"
Phew... Lumian exhaled and walked to the living room window, casting his gaze at Port Farim bathed in the blazing sunlight and the distant Andatna volcano.

Chapter 527: Immersion

Under the sunlight, Port Farim appeared to be tinged with a golden hue, and the air seemed to carry the sweetness of cane sugar.

Lumian lingered by the window, contemplating the whereabouts of the Demon Warlock.

During his rescue the previous night, Burman had slipped into a deep coma, unable to direct the undead creature he controlled. Therefore, the undead being must have relied on its instincts and routines to transport Burman to a safe haven he frequented.

Ordinarily, Fidel's residence would be his top choice. Yet, when Lumian scoured the premises, there were no traces indicating Burman's return.

His initial assumption was that Burman had employed the undead creatures to eliminate Fidel's family, attendants, and servants. Recognizing 16 Rue Coreas as a battlefield and unsafe, they likely sought an alternate hideout.

Where could that be?

From his Traveler's Bag, Lumian retrieved the information Franca had provided about Burman and the rest of the details gathered from Philip, Batna, and the others. He read through it again, attempting to immerse himself in the mindset of the Demon Warlock, simulating his thoughts, actions, and motivations.

Burman hailed from Fog Province, also known as Winter Province, situated in the northern part of Intis. Bordering the Feysac Empire, the region had relatively rustic folk customs, with a penchant for strong liquor.

His wife, Helen, a Port Farim native without Islander heritage, had a grandfather who worked as a cane sugar merchant traveling between Port Farim and Port LeSeur. Unfortunately, he encountered pirates, losing most of his business and relying on a plantation he had previously acquired.

Born and raised on that plantation, Helen witnessed its sale due to conflicts among her father's generation after her grandfather's death. Her family received a portion of the money and relocated to Port Farim. After her father's passing and her mother falling ill, she became an adventurer and crossed paths with Burman.

Both had experienced fortuitous encounters during their adventures, gaining superpowers. They even acquired property in Port Farim, planning a future away from the adventurous life as they grew older.

Several years ago, they, along with a group of fellow adventurers, rented a boat to explore the seas for treasure. Unfortunately, they encountered sea monsters, and only Burman and two others

survived.
Following this tragic incident, Burman's attempts to revive his wife took a progressively desperate turn.
"Treasure hunting at sea? Are there really that many treasures at sea?" Lumian mumbled, convinced that it was highly likely Burman was still in Port Farim.
This place held his dearest memories, remnants of the years spent with his wife, Helen. When selecting a hiding spot, he would instinctively lean towards this area.
With this in mind, Lumian continued reading the latter part of the intel.
As anticipated, Burman's past dangerous experiments had unfolded near the Fog Sea Archipelago, encompassing other islands and the villages and towns along the Northern Continent's coast. If he connected them into irregular concentric circles, the center would be in Port Farim on Saint Tick Island.
Burman uses Port Farim as a base for resurrection attempts in various places... Lumian pondered. He hasn't stirred trouble in Port Farim before, so why the exception this time? If I were Burman in his half-mad state, I'd treat Port Farim as my spiritual home, a haven of beautiful memories. Typically, I wouldn't disrupt the order here. I might even secretly maintain it and handle some audacious pirates and adventurers on the sly... Lumian analyzed thoughtfully.
He had substituted Port Farim with Cordu. Believing that if his sister's death had no connection to Cordu and the peace remained, anyone daring to disturb Cordu's daily life and alter the situation would be his enemy!
Frowning slightly, he sensed there might be crucial details unclear about the previous night's explosion. There could be a reason why Burman killed Fidel and his family beyond a mere disagreement. Fidel, having collaborated with Burman for years, should have known about his unstable mental state. How could such a shrewd merchant not consider the potential repercussions of his words on the Demon Warlock?
Moreover, Burman aimed to eliminate the adventurer Louis Berry to conceal his collaboration with Fidel. If Fidel was already dead, why silence Lumian?
Perhaps, Fidel had assumed he could persuade Burman to wait a few days before acting, only to find Burman already in a deranged state, driven by instinct.
After careful consideration, Lumian decided to re-enter Port Farim and visit Burman and Helen's former residence.
Even though Burman had sold it long ago to fund his resurrection

experiments and it was under official Beyonder scrutiny, there remained a possibility of discovering crucial clues.

What if the mad Burman insisted on returning to his previous abode?

Instructing Lugano to keep an eye on Ludwig, Lumian descended to the deck and encountered Philip.

The Flying Bird's security supervisor regarded Lumian with a mixed expression. Without mentioning the room that seemed to have been bombarded by cannons, he stated, "I'll distribute the remaining repair fees to the participating workers and attendants."

The implication was clear: "I've already compensated those who need to be silenced."

"You can take a share yourself," Lumian replied with a smile.

Philip shook his head and sighed.

"Not having any more incidents like that on the way from Port Farim to Port Santa would be the best reward for me."

"I'll do my best," Lumian sincerely assured him.

He refrained from making promises, acknowledging factors beyond his control.

He also looked forward to reaching Port Santa without trouble and beginning the hunt for the key members of April Fool's—Bard and Ultraman.

Philip gazed at Lumian for a few seconds, as if contemplating whether to report him in advance.

He sighed again.

"The port lockdown will be lifted tonight. The Flying Bird will set sail again tomorrow morning. Don't miss it."

Lumian nodded and asked curiously, "The Demon Warlock has been apprehended?"

"No, but it's pretty much confirmed that it has nothing to do with the ships at the port. Nor is he hiding here," Philip replied nonchalantly. "Burman even killed the prominent merchant Fidel's family last night. They seemed to be in a cooperative relationship. Perhaps Fidel wanted to betray him..."

At this point, Philip gave Lumian a sharp glance.

"Last night, the battle in your room—could it be related to this?"

"What kind of connection do you think there will be?" Lumian asked, amused.

Philip pondered for a moment and couldn't make the connection.

Observing this, Lumian waved his hand and donned his golden straw hat. He descended the gangway to the docks and left the port district.

As Lumian reached Sun Square, adorned with numerous wanted

posters, he was approached by an Islander man with brownish-black skin, sunken eyes, and a deep-set gaze. The man handed him a folded book with a plethora of words and crude patterns printed on it.
"Traveler, this is Port Farim's travel guide. It lists scenic spots, unique delicacies, and sexual entertainment venues," the Islander introduced with zeal. "It'll make your stay here more enjoyable."
Lumian played along and asked, "How much?"
"It's free! I'll give it to you for free!" the Islander exclaimed in a high-pitched voice. "The government prints these for tourists, hoping for a positive impression of Port Farim."
"Awesome." Lumian accepted the guidebook with an expression of "pleasant surprise" and unfolded it.
The guide detailed scenic views and recommendations from various shops—sugar cane outlets, sexual entertainment venues, renowned eateries, and more.
Suddenly, Lumian swiftly drew his revolver and pressed it against the Islander's forehead.
The Islander froze, stunned. After a few seconds, he stammered, "No, no charge. I'm not lying!"
Was this minor situation worth a gun being drawn?
I'm going to call the police!
Lumian smiled and inquired, "What's the connection between these recommended shops and you?"
"No..." The Islander felt the chill of the gun and carefully changed his words. "Th-they paid us to recommend them. Some of them are owned by our partners."
"How many are legitimate shops?" Lumian pressed, undeterred.
"90%." Just as the Islander finished speaking, Lumian cocked the revolver's hammer, sending a clear message.
He hastily added, "90% of them are connected to us."
Lumian chuckled, continuing with another question, "What about the scenery?"
"50%. Only the plantations and primitive tribes are connected to us." The Islander trembled in fear.
Lumian shook the travel guide and smiled at the Islander.
"Show me the real ones."
The Islander quickly pointed out different parts, worried that the gun might misfire.
Only then did Lumian stow away his revolver and take the guidebook to the open-air market on the other side of Sun Square.
He had engaged the Islander partly to frighten the swindler and partly because a new idea had struck him.
For Burman, who had resided in Port Farim for many years, were

some of the delicacies and scenery here also part of his cherished memories?
During setbacks, when he killed his best partner and faced defeat in battle, would he, driven by madness and paranoia, seek out places with beautiful memories to draw strength and recharge?
Lumian believed if he were in Burman's shoes, he would have done the same.
Reason might suggest that he could be tracked and discovered, but half-mad individuals often ignored reason.
Therefore, whether it was the moonlit scenery of the lighthouse, the setting sun behind the volcano, Reptow minced pork, Gasparo seafood rice, or Saint Tick chocolate ice cream, all could attract the covert patronage of the Demon Warlock.
In his current state, there was a high chance that he wouldn't meticulously erase his tracks.
Adjusting his golden straw hat, Lumian made his way through the open-air market, heading toward the cliff mountain outside Farim, where Port Farim's lighthouse stood.

Chapter 528: Treasure Legend

The crash of azure waves echoed against the cliff's base, creating a cascade of white flowers in their wake.

Approaching the lighthouse, Lumian pondered its rumored history, a relic left behind by the Intisians upon their arrival at Saint Tick Island, his gaze fixating on the distant sea.

The night's crimson moonlight, still hours away, refrained from casting its dreamy glow, rendering the scene quiet and undisturbed by tourists.

Circling the lighthouse reminiscent of Roselle's era, Lumian observed for nearly fifteen minutes, fruitlessly searching for any sign of the Demon Warlock.

He didn't anticipate a direct encounter with Burman; it wasn't yet the time to admire the moon. Lumian simply sought to discern if Burman would visit to reminisce about the past and his wife after waking up last night—a moment of solace to steady his heart and find the strength to persevere.

The lighthouse guardian, with a pipe emitting the aroma of roasted tobacco leaves, offered a friendly reminder, "Kid, there's nothing much to see here during the day. It's a whole different story at night."

Lumian smiled and inquired, "Do people come in the middle of the night?"

"Indeed," the 50-year-old guardian boasted. "Those Trier playboys love bringing their dates here to bask in the moonlight."

"Any mysterious figures, perhaps someone donning a hood and pretending to be a Warlock?" Lumian pressed on.

The lighthouse guardian's face betrayed a nostalgic expression.

"Sometimes. Thought it was a ghostly silhouette a few times."

"Did such a figure visit late last night?" Lumian queried, a subtle curl forming on his lips.

There was nothing wrong with his speculation from his immersion!

Perhaps his similar experiences allowed him to better understand Burman's mental state and paranoid thoughts.

The guardian replied, "Can't say for sure. I didn't see anything."

Lumian didn't press further. He decided to return in the early morning hours, the enchanting few hours beneath the moonlight.

Over the next three hours, he explored the truly renowned gourmet restaurants in Port Farim. Despite asking similar questions, Lumian obtained no valuable information.

It became apparent that Demon Warlock Burman exercised restraint under normal circumstances, avoiding impulsive actions.

He seldom frequented crowded places, and when he did, his disguise was impeccable.
By 4 p.m., Lumian reached Port Farim's modest steam locomotive station. He spent 3 verl d'or for a ticket bound for the Andatna volcano mine.
If he aimed to witness the sunset there, the journey had to commence now.
Woosh! Clunk! Clunk! Clunk! The iron-black carriage belched thick smoke as it lumbered along the railway sleepers.
Gradually, it gained momentum, akin to a colossal giant overcoming inertia and mobilizing its components.
Seated by the window, Lumian held a golden straw hat, quietly admiring the vanishing plantations.
Shortly before 6 p.m., the train halted outside Andatna's volcanic mine.
Adorning his straw hat, Lumian bypassed the mine entrance, opting for a nearby trail leading to the volcano's summit.
As the greenery dwindled, grayish-black hues prevailed. Occasional red rocks punctuated the landscape.
Approaching the mountaintop, desolation intensified. Grayish-black gravel lay dormant in the hushed wind.
Without the shelter of foliage, Lumian's vision expanded. The peculiar grandeur of this place seemed to embody the vastness of desolation and silence.
Following the tourist-worn grayish-black path, Lumian advanced step by step toward the volcano's mouth, revealing coal-black surfaces with reddish depressions.
The temperature inside was notably warmer.
Unbridled winds stirred, sending grayish-black gravel airborne, causing human forms to sway.
In this spectacle, the nearly setting sun bathed the desolate surroundings in a golden-red glow, intensifying the sunken redness.
Pressing down on his straw hat, Lumian ventured two to three hundred meters along the volcano's crater.
Abruptly, the mountaintop wind subsided, and the suspended gravel settled in eerie silence.
Lumian immediately spotted a figure standing silently on the grayish-black diagonal wall outside the volcano's crater, bathed in the last radiant sunlight.
Cloaked in black robes and a deep hood, the figure attentively watched the gradual descent of the golden-red sun.
Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he advanced step by step, refraining from initiating an attack.

Sensing Lumian's approach, the hooded figure turned around, unveiling a pale-white face marked by decaying wounds and a wide swath of fur.
It was none other than Demon Warlock Burman!
Perhaps influenced by the serene scenery and haunting memories, Burman, known for his madness, spoke wearily, "You've actually found this place."
Lumian, who had been securing his golden straw hat against the strong wind, chuckled self-deprecatingly and responded,
"If not for my illusions and hope, and if I didn't have numerous enemies awaiting my discovery, I would frequently return to Cordu and the nearest high mountain pasture. The grass there is vividly green, vast and expansive, with pale-yellow flowers in full bloom. Countless sheep roam about. The sky mirrors the brilliance of gems, and the occasional drifting white clouds resemble sheep grazing on the ground. At night, the stars emerge, densely packed like diamond gravel at the bottom of a clear river..."
Standing amidst the blazing sunlight and the vast, silent grayish-black surroundings, Lumian couldn't help but reminisce about Cordu Village and the alpine pasture.
Burman didn't interrupt. After Lumian finished speaking, he wore a dazed expression and uttered with a smile more pained than joyful,
"Helen and I thought we could come here to watch the sunset whenever we pleased since it's just a ticket away. But she never came again..."
And you don't even need to take the steam locomotive... Lumian sighed slowly and said, "What happened back then?"
Burman's face contorted in distortion, the agony evident in his expression.
"We were deceived. Something was wrong with the treasure map. We encountered real sea monsters!
"Damn the Islanders. Helen always believed they resorted to deceit and thuggery out of necessity. All the respectable positions were held by pure Intisians, but we treated them well and placed our trust in them. Yet, they colluded with others to betray us for money!
"I'll kill him, those deceivers, and every Islander!"
Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Some of the self-proclaimed noble Trieriens are swindlers, while others sell their bodies. I don't generalize against Islanders, but I remain cautious of specific individuals."
Suddenly, Lumian felt inspired.
"Was the Islander who betrayed you from the Marauder pathway?"

"Yes." Burman's face twitched with unrestrained anger.
Was it a Swindler acting? Lumian asked cautiously, "Did he have a tendency to wear monocles or pinch his eye socket?"
He pointed at his right eye.
"No." Burman seemed perplexed by Lumian's question.
Lumian heaved a sigh of relief.
"What's his name? Did you manage to kill him?"
Burman's pale face suddenly flushed, and decaying liquid dripped down.
"His name is Mark Benito! After that incident, he vanished. I never found him!"
Lumian chose not to provoke Burman further and inquired, "Which treasure were you seeking back then?"
"In the depths of the Fog Sea, there's an island. The inhabitants there don't age or truly die," Burman recalled the treasure rumors he had gathered. "There's reason to believe that something incredibly precious is hidden on that island. We didn't want to become enemies with the islanders. Our only hope was to infiltrate the island and steal some ageless medicine."
His words were somewhat disorganized, skipping over details.
"It bears a striking resemblance to the legend of the Fountain of Unaging," Lumian remarked after pondering. "The Adventurer series has already hinted that the Fountain of Unaging is a falsehood."
Ignoring him, Burman continued, "We found some evidence and obtained a treasure map to the island. To our surprise, the map was a forgery!
"The sea monsters wrecked our ship. In order to allow me to utilize that special witchcraft, Helen stood in front of me... I witnessed her torn into two by the sea monsters. I saw despair in her eyes..."
Burman panted heavily, unable to continue.
"And then, you switched to the Death pathway?" Lumian changed the topic.
Burman's icy flaxen-colored eyes gleamed.
"That's correct. Only Death, who controls the Death domain, can bring Helen back!
"In the treasure legend, many details suggest that only Death can achieve eternal life. Understanding the mysteries of death is the key to true resurrection! It's not that the islanders won't die; they can be revived!"
"Do you genuinely believe in that treasure?" Lumian already had an answer in mind after posing the question.
The partially unhinged Burman clung to every lifeline, trusting every rumor that promised to bring Helen back to life.

"I do." Burman nodded and spoke with a deep voice, "That's because I encountered people from that island some time ago. There really is such an island. There are truly islanders who don't age or truly die!"

"Really?" Lumian blurted out.

Burman's eyes burned with fanaticism as he declared, "I wanted to capture him, but he defeated me. Instead of killing me, he sympathized with my plight and imparted some knowledge about the Death domain. There's a way to bring Helen back to life!

"That cursed swindler. Fidel's attendant is nothing but a swindler. I didn't intend to rush the resurrection ritual. I wasn't fully prepared, but since he's a swindler, I'll kill him! All Islanders are swindlers! They all deserve to die!"

Is he truly from that island? Or could he be another swindler? Lumian realized that the incident with the swindler, Roddy, had triggered Burman. There was also the influence of that islander...

Lumian narrowed his eyes and inquired, "What's the islander's name, and what does he look like?"

Burman suddenly became cautious, scrutinizing Lumian.

"What brings you here?"

Observing Burman's reaction, Lumian sighed and, with abnormal composure, said, "I'm here to kill you."

Burman was taken aback before bursting into laughter.

"For what? A bounty?"

Discarding the golden straw hat in his hand, Lumian lowered his body slightly and replied in a deep voice, "Punish your sins and put an end to your suffering."

Burman ceased his laughter and raised his hands with a cold expression.

"Bring it on, then."

Chapter 529: Irrational

Burman's raised hands released a sprinkling of fluorescent powder.

His body began to fade, growing more transparent, as if he had transformed into a being from the spirit world—difficult for ordinary people to perceive.

In the blink of an eye, the Demon Warlock vanished.

Lumian made no move to intervene or evade potential attacks. Calmly, he retrieved the Flog boxing gloves adorned with iron-black spikes from his Traveler's Bag and wore them.

Completing this preparation, he suddenly knelt on one knee, pressing his hands to the ground.

Crimson flames erupted in all directions from Lumian's body, accompanied by a series of explosions.

Amidst the rumbling, flames surged, dominating the grayish-black wilderness. Burman's black-robed figure materialized in midair.

He slowly floated towards Lumian, narrowing the distance between them.

Lumian's figure abruptly vanished, reappearing behind Burman.

Spirit World Traversal!

Without hesitation, Lumian, holding a crimson fireball in his left hand, harrumphed.

Two beams of white light shot out from his nose, targeting Burman.

Floating in midair, Burman didn't lose consciousness as before. His body swayed, forcefully turning around to observe Lumian descending into the sea of flames on the ground.

An illusory vertical eye, dark purple and nearly black, materialized between Burman's brows, reflecting Lumian's figure amid pale-white patterns.

Almost simultaneously, a lanky black shadow emerged from within Burman's body. Nearby, arms made of bones or decayed flesh and pus extended from the void, encircling Burman's transparent and thin form.

He hadn't used witchcraft to quietly approach Lumian and strike. Instead, he had clandestinely swapped his spirit with the undead under his command, setting a trap to entice the enemy into deploying that peculiar spell to attack his body.

In such a scenario, the absence of one's Spirit Body meant immunity to abilities targeting the Soul Body!

Burman could then seize the opportunity to use the Eye of the Spirit to intimidate the enemy and create an opening for the manipulated undead.

This time, he refrained from delving deeper into the secret of the other party's Spirit Body. His goal was to uncover its vulnerabilities, strike with a lethal blow, and absorb the corresponding mystical knowledge!
Having suffered greatly from the Spell of Harrumph the previous night, he had used this ability as a breakthrough from the beginning.
In an instant, Burman's spirit completed the exchange with the lanky shadow and returned to his body.
Simultaneously, Lumian experienced once again the sensation of his spirit being intimidated and suppressed, as if frozen. Terrifying arms covered in festering warts or with eyes extended from the void, reaching out for his body.
At that moment, the crimson fireball in Lumian's left hand erupted.
Boom!
The explosion's force was mostly mitigated by the Flog boxing gloves, but since they weren't fully covered, the exposed part of Lumian's left palm was turned into a bloody mess.
An intense and familiar pain shot through his brain and Spirit Body, bringing him back to awareness.
Seizing this moment of clarity, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder again, vanishing above the sea of flames and disappearing from the strange undead arms extending from the void.
Likewise, he remained vigilant against Burman's Eye of Illusory.
The crimson, nearly white fireball in his left hand was structurally unstable. He had to divert his attention to maintain it, and he couldn't sustain it when affected by the Eye of Illusory, leading to its natural disintegration and a self-
inflicted awakening.
If this failed to disrupt the Eye of Illusory's intimidation, the sea of flames below served as Lumian's second preparation. The residual aura of the Blood Emperor in his right hand was his last resort.
Upon vanishing, Lumian reappeared behind Burman once more.
Prepared, Burman raised his hands and scattered a tree-like powder.
Crackling sounds followed as silver-white lightning struck Lumian's head, as though a storm ruler had unleashed divine retribution from the sky.
For most Beyonders, this would be enough to paralyze and make them tremble incessantly. Yet, Lumian showed no such signs. Instead, he appeared like a reflection in the water, shattered by the lightning.

The real Lumian was curled up at the bottom of the figure. Burman had struck the phantom created using the Niese Face!
The Niese Face was essentially an illusion, but it couldn't be cast on others or items. Lumian had to rely on himself, pretending to be a root system with branches and flowers above, forming a derived illusion.
There was no fundamental difference between this and using the Niese Face to make himself taller and bulkier.
Amidst the crackling lightning, two crimson fireballs materialized beneath Lumian's feet and behind him.
Rumble!
The fireball exploded, propelling Lumian towards the levitating Burman.
Burman, being close proximity, couldn't dodge the swift Lumian in time. He could only slightly turn his body as a bone spear sprouted from his shoulder, its tip unusually sharp.
A grin spread across Lumian's face. He didn't evade, allowing the bone spear to pierce his right chest.
With a resounding thud, he swung his left fist, delivering a powerful blow to the side of Burman's face. The Demon Warlock's head twisted, revealing deep blood-stained, pus-filled holes on his face. His eyes burned with rage, as if he were witnessing the murderer of his wife!
The black mark on Lumian's right shoulder emitted a dim light once more.
His figure vanished beside Burman, dissolving into the encircling lanky black shadows and other undead creatures, leaving behind the bone spear stained with his blood.
This time, Lumian reappeared dozens of meters away, at the edge of the sea of flames.
The wound on his right chest was grotesque, blood dripping from it. In his hand appeared a dark-red bone flute with a hole in it.
Symphony of Hatred!
Lumian brought the bone flute to his lips. As he retreated, he played a mournful and haunting melody.
Once again invoking the Eye of Illusory, Burman, who was on the verge of catching up, was frozen in astonishment. Even the undead ceased their movements.
Suddenly, blood and pus seeped from Burman's eyes, nose, mouth, and ears, as if a muffled and invisible explosion had occurred within him.
His anger, paranoia, and thirst for revenge were fueled by the Symphony of Hatred.
This inflicted a severe blow on him.

Lumian refrained from playing the Symphony of Hatred from the outset because Burman differed from other Beyonders. Others needed to identify the problem, but with Burman, there were too many uncertainties.

His mental state was extremely unstable, burdened by severe psychological issues. His overwhelming desire to revive his wife and seek revenge on the Islander swindler was palpable. His body had undergone modifications from the Death domain, and Lumian had inflicted significant injuries on him the previous night. There were substantial hidden dangers...

Faced with such an adversary, Lumian himself was uncertain about the outcome if he were to unleash the Symphony of Hatred through the shepherd's flute. It might be manageable if it only triggered desires and emotions, but if Burman's mental state lost even the most basic restraints, the Demon Warlock could potentially lose control on the spot, transforming into a monstrous entity with mixed abilities.

Such a monster would likely be even more challenging to deal with than Burman!

Hence, after the Spell of Harrumph failed, Lumian promptly shifted to using Flog boxing gloves to kindle Burman's corresponding desires and emotions. This strategic approach increased the likelihood that when Lumian eventually used the Symphony of Hatred, it would exploit the target's emotions and desires, inflicting severe harm.

Observing Burman descend into the sea of flames amid the eruption of emotions and desires, Lumian executed another Spirit World Traversal, appearing in front of him in an instant.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He extended his arms, unleashing a relentless barrage of attacks on Burman's body.

On the surface of his Flog fists, a crimson fireball, almost white, compressed layer by layer.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Flog tore at Burman's flesh like a two-headed python.

Rumble!

Crimson fireballs erupted around Lumian, with no concern for waste. They formed a barrier, preventing the lanky figure, strange arms, and other undead from interfering.

One punch, two punches, three punches. Lumian's eyes were fixed on the mangled Burman.

At that moment, he reflected on the village destroyed by Burman and the innocent lives lost because of him.

How many were beloved wives, waiting husbands, dependent

parents, and cherished children?
Cordu had been annihilated due to the ambitions of the evil gods.
What about the innocent?
Lumian's eyes gradually turned crimson as he clenched his fists.
This time, he didn't empathize with Burman. Instead, he placed himself in the village he had destroyed and the lives he had taken.
Wasn't Cordu like this back then?
The ambitions of these evil gods are to blame!
In just a few seconds, Burman snapped out of his pain and emitted an evil, cold, and incomprehensible voice.
The sound seemed to peel away Lumian's flesh, exposing his Spirit Body to the perilous sunlight and the grayish-black gravel.
Lumian's movements slowed, and the grotesque arms finally reached in, dragging Burman away from the area.
Phew... Lumian exhaled and recovered.
He didn't pursue. Instead, he gazed silently at the void ahead, raised his right hand, and snapped his fingers.
Rumble!
Amidst the sudden eruption of intense flames, Burman's body materialized, shattering from an explosion.
Fire Infusion!
Hunter's Fire Infusion!
In truth, Lumian hadn't acted rationally. His optimal strategy would have been to seize the moment when Burman's emotions and desires were ignited and strike at his vital points with the Symphony of Hatred, delivering a decisive blow. However, he yearned to repeatedly pummel the "hidden" version of himself that terrified him!
With a thud, Burman's head clattered to the ground.
In his daze, he caught sight of a slender figure with black hair, blue eyes, and a delicate face.
It was his wife, Helen.
Y-you're back? Burman couldn't help but smile and extend his arm.
He no longer had an arm.
Gradually, he lost consciousness. Darkness enveloped his vision, as if sunlight lurked deep within.
Demon Warlock Burman—dead.

Chapter 530: Beginning

Lumian observed Burman's head, frozen in surprise and relief. He removed the Flog boxing gloves and the Symphony of Hatred, as well as ended the Niese Face.

Donning the silver Lie earring and retrieving a white bandage, Lumian wrapped it around the burned wound on his right chest and his bloody left hand.

Crimson flames surged around him, engulfing his dripping blood and splattering flesh.

Throughout this process, Lumian gathered the nearby corpse fragments that Burman had scattered and piled them beside the head.

He had been calculating the time. If Burman's Beyonder characteristic still hadn't materialized, he would have to move the corpse pile to the forest beside the Andatna volcano.

This was because the Flog boxing gloves attracted the attention of certain hidden entities, enabling them to command dangerous creatures to attack.

In the past, Lumian would have had to leave the scene as soon as he finished using the Flog boxing gloves, but the battle lasted only a short time. The Flog boxing gloves had already been stowed into his Traveler's Bag, allowing him to wait a little longer.

Lumian observed various colored light spots—light purple, pale-white, and pitch-black—emerge from Burman's head and the scattered corpse pile. Among the items on the ground and torn clothes, Lumian found a diverse array of objects.

There was a miniature brain, blood-dyed and resembling brass, a retractable pitch-black telescope, ointment and powder in metal canisters, a short bone scepter, a peculiar badge encircling the sun with bones, a soft-cover notebook in an iron box, an ordinary-looking golden ring, and scattered gold and silver coins...

The deposit certificates and paper cash had likely been destroyed by the explosion and the inferno.

Lumian carefully stowed each item away, sensing that three possessed superpowers. Merely coming into contact with them triggered various adverse reactions.

Thankfully, I had no intention of prolonging the battle with Burman from the start... Him using these mystical items later would have been troublesome... To deal with such a half-mad and resourceful enemy, I must end the battle swiftly and deny him a chance to recover... Some items were likely gathered by him, while others might have been taken from Fidel... Lumian concluded, finally picking up the dented and cracked iron box.

Inside the soft-cover notebook lay a blood-stained treasure map. With a brief glance, Lumian suspected it to be a sea map leading to an island in a specific sea area. It contained records of weather patterns and markings of safe sea routes.
Could this be the fake treasure map sold to Burman by Mark Benito? Lumian mused. Flipping to the first page of the dark soft-cover notebook, he encountered scrawled words:
"My mind isn't reliable all the time. I tend to forget many things. I must record all relevant knowledge and prevent them from being forgotten."
Lumian refrained from delving deeper. He carefully stowed away the fake treasure map and the soft-cover notebook.
Lumian noticed an ordinary-looking golden ring adorning Burman's left ring finger in the corpse pile.
It bore a striking resemblance to the gold rings found in the pile of spoils. They varied in size, texture, and quality.
Lumian instantly grasped the situation.
He removed the golden ring from Burman's finger and tied it to another golden ring with a piece of wire he had on hand.
He approached the grayish-black volcano's crater and silently tossed the rings into the reddened depression.
At that moment, Burman's Beyonder characteristics fully materialized, merging with parts of his corpse, resulting in two distinct items.
One was a light-purple transparent left eye, while the other was a pale-white right eye veiled in darkness.
Lumian carefully stowed away the two Beyonder characteristics, taking hold of Burman's head before vanishing from the spot.
Silently, the remaining parts of Burman's body ignited, enveloping the grayish-black volcano in crimson flames.
More than 200 meters away, Lumian retrieved the golden straw hat that had been blown by the strong wind.
As he secured it on his head, he swiftly disappeared.
This time, he appeared on the road outside the Andatna volcano's steam locomotive.
Lumian glanced up at the grayish-black volcano's crater, witnessing the golden-red sunset, resembling flowing lava, receding faster than expected.
The mountaintop swiftly darkened.
...
In the cathedral of The Fool in Port Farim, not far from Quartier des Black Pearls, Lumian, adjusting his golden straw hat, approached the towering half-giant bishop donned in a half top hat and black trench coat. In a deep voice, he said,

"I want to repent."
The half-giant bishop, with light-blue eyes and a towering stature exceeding 2.5 meters, regarded Lumian for a moment before nodding. "Follow me."
He led Lumian into a specialized confessional—a windowless, pitch-black chamber.
"I don't wish to repent in the dark," Lumian calmly said, removing his golden straw hat.
The half-giant bishop ignited the candles, sealing the door shut.
Pa! Lumian tossed a head with pale-white fur and vacant eye sockets to the half-giant bishop's feet.
"Did you commit murder?" the half-giant bishop inquired in a mellow tone, giving the head a brief once-over.
"No, I just want to help him repent." Lumian gestured towards the bloody head, oozing yellow pus. "He's Demon Warlock Burman."
"Burman?" Only then did the half-giant bishop closely inspect the head, recognizing distinct features.
He fell silent for a few moments before stating, "You want the Church to assist you in claiming the bounty from the Intis government?"
"As I mentioned, I'm here to repent for him. His bounty is part of his penance." Lumian's voice remained unchanged.
The half-giant bishop struggled to comprehend.
Lumian retrieved most of the items acquired from Burman from his Traveler's Bag, leaving behind the dark soft-cover notebook and the fake treasure map.
Clatter. These items, some endowed with superpowers, some valuable, spilled onto the ground.
"They're also part of Burman's penance," Lumian explained simply. "I want to use the bounty and the money exchanged for these items to establish a charity fund to compensate those who have been harmed by Burman, or their relatives. If there's any excess, please use it to help the homeless children."
The half-giant bishop, sporting a top hat and trench coat, fell silent for a few seconds.
"The Demon Warlock bounty stands at 600,000 verl d'or. These items hold considerable value too. Together, they could fetch nearly 1 million verl d'or. It's a substantial sum for anyone. Enough to ensure you don't have to take further risks. Are you certain about donating it to us and establishing a charity fund?"
Lumian didn't directly answer the half-giant bishop's question. Instead, he reiterated, "This is Burman's penance."
"Alright, since you trust our Church, we'll comply with your wishes," the half-giant bishop, named Theis, said. "Remember my

name and feel free to monitor the charity fund's progress closely."
Lumian gazed at The Fool's Sacred Emblem in the confessional, pressed his hand to his chest, and gave a slight bow.
"Praise The Fool!"
He then closed his eyes and prayed, Great Lord, I implore you to punish the world for their sins and watch over our compensation. This isn't atonement; it's self-punishment...
Lumian repented earnestly for a while before straightening up. He opened his eyes and turned to leave.
"What shall be the name of the charity fund?" the half-giant bishop hurriedly inquired.
Lumian took a deep breath and replied, "Helen, the Helen Charity Fund."
"Do we need to inform the authorities about who killed Burman?" the half-giant bishop cautiously asked.
"No need, but there's no requirement to deliberately obscure the clues for me." Lumian didn't look back. He put on his golden straw hat and exited The Fool's cathedral.
...
That night, Lumian once again entered the bar beside Sun Square known as Pelican.
Batna Comté, as usual, sat at the bar counter, sipping on Golden Somme sugar wine. Beside him was a girl dressed as an adventurer with adorable facial features.
Lumian walked over and joined Batna and the other patrons. He smiled and snapped his fingers at the bartender.
"A glass of Golden Somme."
Batna glanced at him and remarked, "Someone's in a good mood."
"Indeed." Lumian received the golden syrup from the bartender and tapped the table with the bottom of the glass. Then, he stood up and raised the glass. "Everyone, I've encountered two things worth celebrating today."
He spoke with enthusiasm and joy, "The first is that I completed a commission worth more than 100,000 verl d'or!"
"Impossible..." Batna and the female adventurer beside him exclaimed in unison.
This bounty was even higher than Black Baronet's bounty. *How could it be accomplished in a day?*
Moreover, Batna knew that Louis Berry's employer, Fidel, was already deceased. *How could he have received a new commission?*
Lumian continued in a passionate tone, "To celebrate this, I'll treat everyone at the bar counter to a glass of Golden Somme!"
Nearly ten adventurers and patrons expressed admiration. One of them teased, "Regardless of the truth, I believe you!"

The others chimed in.
Lumian's smile widened.
"Second thing to be happy about—I've woven a tale to deceive a group of fools!"
Suddenly, the expressions of everyone at the bar counter froze.
Lumian glanced at them and continued,"But it's true that drinks are on the house!"
The adventurers and patrons booed, expressing that if they could drink for free, they didn't mind being fools.
Thus, Lumian spent 96 licks, or 4.8 verl d'or, treating the twelve people at the bar counter to a glass of Golden Somme.
Observing Louis Berry, Batna silently muttered, He's genuinely happy...
...
Late at night, aboard the Flying Bird, Room 5, first-class cabin.
Lumian returned to the barely habitable master bedroom, ignited the kerosene lamp, and retrieved the dark soft-cover notebook and the fake treasure map he had obtained from Demon Warlock Burman from his Traveler's Bag.

Chapter 531: Depths of Death

Bathed in the yellowish glow of the kerosene lamp, Lumian perused Burman's notebook. The pages chronicled the erratic musings of a mind teetering on the edge of instability.

"Once life slips away, spirits journey to the spirit world, except in rare cases!

"If I can craft the right summoning chant, a Spirit Guide's power could pull Helen's spirit back to our reality.

"That's step one toward bringing her back."

Upon seeing this, Lumian indiscernibly shook his head.

If only resurrection were that simple...

He turned the page.

"New mystical knowledge gained:

"In ancient times, intelligent beings ventured into the Underworld after death. Those deeply devout or exceptionally impactful could ascend to the corresponding deity's Heaven. However, during the Fifth Epoch, a surplus of undead lingered beyond the Underworld.

"I'm uncertain if Helen's spirit has entered the Underworld or returned solely to the spirit realm. When summoning, I must address these separately; mixing them would guarantee failure.

"Despite the sea monsters' formidable might, they lack the power to confine a soul. No similar occurrences manifest in that sea region. For now, special circumstances needn't be considered. Additionally, Helen wasn't a fervent follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun."

...

"I encountered Helen again.

"But she's entirely lost the memory of me.

"Her form and essence are gradually fading away. In a few short years, she'll transform into just another undead.

"I have no more than five years.

"How can I reawaken her consciousness and recover her memories? Merely providing a vessel capable of housing a departed spirit doesn't seem sufficient."

...

"Don't forget the moonlit waves by the city's lighthouse. They bore witness to my proposal and Helen's acceptance."

...

"Don't forget Gasparo seafood rice; it's Helen's favorite. After every adventure, when we returned to Port Farim, she always suggested indulging in it."

...

"Don't forget the sunset at Andatna volcano. That's where we met

and vowed to revisit often in the future. Even as we age, we can't let that romance fade away..."
...
"Don't forget... Don't forget... Don't forget..."
...
"My head hurts."
...
"I razed a town, leading to the deaths of two to three hundred people.
"The sight of those couples, parents, and children perishing didn't bring me joy.
"Instead, my heart plunged into darkness.
"I acknowledge this as my sin, an irreversible mistake. I'm aware that I'm no longer the Burman you once liked.
"Yet, I harbor no regrets."
...
"Swindlers, curse them!
"Ending these swindlers has rekindled a long-lost sense of satisfaction."
...
"Helen, if you were still alive, we might have had our own child, right?
"Why do those evil Warlocks always employ infants, children, and their remains as essential ingredients for the creation of their dark arts?
"I've become even more evil than them..."
...
"Helen, I've lost my way. All my endeavors have ended in failure."
...
"Helen, I aspire to acquire the Sequence 5 potion formula and ingredients for the Death pathway."
...
"Helen, Fidel intervened. He warned that it would turn me into a monster and erase my original memories.
"Helen, I refuse to forget you.
"Helen, please forgive my cowardice."
...
"Helen, I actually encountered that islander from Resurrection Island!
"It truly exists!
"Harrison defeated me, but he spared my life. He questioned why I had forcibly transitioned to the Death pathway.
"He revealed that my previous attempts were misguided. True resurrection isn't that straightforward.

"He explained that within the depths of death lies everyone's mark. Only by bringing forth the corresponding mark into reality and utilizing it as a foundation to reconstruct spirit and flesh can we achieve genuine resurrection, retaining our original knowledge and complete memories.
"Helen, I'm overjoyed. I glimpse hope in reviving you once more."
...
"Harrison imparted knowledge about the Death domain to me. It's through understanding this knowledge and reclaiming their mark that he and his kin can undergo repeated deaths and resurrections, escaping the clutches of mortality.
"While they seldom depart Resurrection Island, it's not an absolute. Travel-
loving islanders like Harrison have ventured to different lands, leaving the Resurrection Island legend imprinted in the memories of a select few humans. Those with sinister motives compiled this information into a sea map for Resurrection Island.
"The treasure map Mark sold us is counterfeit, but parts of it trace back to the genuine one. Harrison, in his quest, left Resurrection Island to eliminate the authentic map and eradicate all who know how to reach that sea and discover Resurrection Island.
"Helen, armed with Harrison's information, I attempted to summon a spirit from the depths of death. I succeeded, conjuring an evil spirit named Arden. As it was feeble, I easily vanquished it, collecting its blood for the ensuing ritual."
...
"Helen, forgive me. I couldn't rein in my emotions.
"Ever since encountering Harrison and gaining the knowledge to truly bring you back, impatience has seized me. I can't control my emotions.
"Those islanders are swindlers deserving of death. I ended the life of a swindler and numerous others. I refused to squander any more time, hastening the ritual.
"Helen, I'm sorry. I failed again. I wasn't adequately prepared."
...
"Helen, have I lost my sanity entirely? A mere retort from Fidel triggered a frenzy, leading me to slay everyone in the house.
"He must perish too, the one who dared to threaten me and Fidel!"
...
"Helen, I've failed. It's been a while since I sustained such severe injuries.
"My body is largely undead. These wounds aren't fatal, but I lack any allies.
"Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

...
"Helen, I've missed you once again."
Lumian reached the conclusion of the dark soft-covered notebook and fixated on the sentence for an extended moment.
It was as if he had transformed into a statue.
After a few minutes, Lumian couldn't resist raising his right hand to massage his temples.
The marks from the depths of death, Resurrection Island, and Harrison inundated his mind, prompting a sudden regret for not seeking Franca's assistance.
To ensure a clean demise for Burman, he never intended to channel the Demon Warlock's spirit from the outset. This meant he had no plans to return to Trier and bring Franca to his current location.
However, his instinct now urged him to delve further into the resurrection method outlined by Harrison. He desired an understanding of the island where inhabitants experienced repeated deaths and rebirths.
Phew... Lumian closed the notebook and exhaled, making an effort to recollect his knowledge of death-related mysticism.
He recalled hearing the words "death" and "mark" conjoined.
Madam Magician had mentioned the term "death mark" while answering a question about the Tudor figure at the Samaritan Women's Spring!
Is this a concept distinct from remnant spirits and imprints, directly linked to resurrection?
From the depths of death... What lurks within the depths of death...
What I now know that is explicitly tied to death—the Underworld, the Samaritan Women's Spring, the River Styx connecting two worlds...
What a pity. I wonder what Harrison from Resurrection Island looks like...
Burman's recorded knowledge is in disarray. It seemed he wrote whatever thoughts occurred to him. Without him, organizing a complete resurrection ritual and the corresponding principles proves exceedingly challenging...
No, not just challenging. Impossible. Burman only documented what he feared he might forget. The remaining knowledge is entirely absent... Lumian rubbed his temples once more and unfolded the counterfeit treasure map. After careful scrutiny, he couldn't discern which parts were authentic and which were spurious.
He intended to send the map to Franca and Jenna at dawn,

employing them to employ mysticism to differentiate between the real and the fake.

...

The next morning, Lumian wiped his mouth with a napkin and observed Ludwig grappling with the breakfast dishes.

Knock, knock, knock. A gentle rap echoed on the door.

"Please come in." Lumian gestured for Lugano to open the door.

Do you really think I'm a servant? Alright, providing the money makes you the boss... Lugano criticized, leaving the dining table to open the door.

It was Philip outside.

Philip entered the room, smiling at Lumian.

"We'll set sail in two and a half hours. If you have any special items you want to buy, do it as soon as possible."

"I don't," Lumian replied with a smile as he stood up.

Philip glanced out the window and said, "By the way, you might not be aware, but the Demon Warlock has been apprehended."

"Is that so?" Lugano looked surprised.

Over the past few days, the most popular topic among the passengers on the ship was Demon Warlock Burman, who had caused them to stay in Port Farim.

Seeing Lumian raise his eyebrows in inquiry, Philip said with a relaxed expression,

"Not only was Burman apprehended, but he was also in the state of a corpse."

"Who's behind this?" Lumian asked, his curiosity piqued.

Philip shook his head.

"I don't have all the details yet. What I do know is that it's closely tied to The Fool's Church. The adventurer Gehrman Sparrow is said to be their messenger."

"Could it be that the adventurer took matters into his own hands?" Lugano asked eagerly.

At sea, he naturally heard about faith in The Fool and had no doubts about it

—sailors, passengers, and dock porters would tell him about it.

"Hard to say. But anyone capable of taking down a Demon Warlock has to be at least as formidable as a pirate admiral." Philip sighed deeply.

Suddenly, a commotion echoed from the gangway. Passengers destined to board at Port Farim were finally given the green light to board the Flying Bird.

Lumian approached the window and spotted a familiar face.

Batna Comté!

He and the adorable-looking female adventurer climbed aboard

the deck together.
Lumian pushed open the window and called out, "Batna, are you guys headed to Port Santa as well?"
Batna looked up, surprised, his eyes fixed on the rooms on the top floor.
Spotting Louis Berry, he grinned and replied, "Absolutely. I'm off to witness Port Santa's sea prayer ritual!"

Chapter 532: "Real" Map

Among the nations of the Northern Continent, only the Lord of Storms in Loen wielded authority over the sea. Yet, sailors, sea merchants, and adventurers loyal to other deities sought to evade shipwrecks, brutal weather, and the need for specific protection. This led to various compromises and unique circumstances.

Certain Churches established subsidiary gods, Angels, and Saints endowed with storm and sea-related powers for followers with corresponding concerns. Take, for instance, the Sea God of the Church of The Fool.

In some Churches, believers were tacitly permitted to hold a partial belief in the Lord of Storms.

Other Churches turned a blind eye to the folklore beliefs flourishing in ports and islands, allowing the performance of specific rituals without requiring the presence of clergymen.

The sea prayer ritual of Port Santa in the Feynapotter Kingdom fell into the latter category. Its folklore was believed to trace back to the Fourth Epoch. This annual event, overseen by the Church of Earth Mother, was modest and confined to this port; it lacked any widespread publicity.

In essence, nearly nobody—neither the locals of Port Santa nor the merchants, adventurers, or pirates frequenting the shores of the Fog Sea—

was aware of such a sea prayer ritual.

After gathering the pertinent details, Lumian made an initial assessment that either Bard or Ultraman, the culprits behind the sea prayer ritual pranks, were likely locals of Port Santa or actively engaged in maritime affairs.

Considering that Bard's work, "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles," had been specifically handed over to Trier's underground booksellers for publication, Lumian leaned towards the belief that Ultraman had been the instigator of the problems at Port Santa's sea prayer ritual.

Despite the fact that "Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles" seemed more suited for sale in Intis, Lumian reasoned that if Bard had a permanent residence in the Feynapotter Kingdom, it would be wiser to publish it under the Feynapotter Kingdom's name before discreetly selling it to Intis. This precaution was to avoid drawing the attention of Intis's secret police.

Many Beyonders had underestimated the vigilance of ordinary police officers and investigators, resulting in unwanted attention and arrests by official Beyonders who got wind of the news.

Upon learning that Batna and his female companion desired to

witness Port Santa's sea prayer ritual, Lumian waved with a grin.
"Me too!"
He stepped back from the window, biding his time until nearly noon to compose a letter detailing his recent encounters and the handling of Burman's "legacy."
After folding the letter and wrapping it within the folds of the fake treasure map, Lumian summoned Rabbit Chasel once again.
The rabbit-like spirit creature still sported its gold-rimmed glasses and a small, blurry half top hat.
Silently observing for a few moments, Lumian then handed over the items destined for Franca and Jenna.
"Thank you," he said politely.
That's basic courtesy!
"No need to thank me," replied Rabbit Chasel, removing his half top hat and executing a slight bow.
Lumian's lips twitched as he witnessed the mutated Rabbit of Knowledge disappear from the room.
He was worried that this rabbit might unpredictably draw its gun and finish off the sender at any given moment.
The next time around, he resolved to caution Jenna against imparting such dangerous knowledge to Rabbit Chasel!
...
Trier, within the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.
Franca glanced at Rabbit Chasel, adorned with its half top hat and gold-
rimmed glasses. Leaning closer to Jenna, she whispered, "Isn't it too dangerous to let it read the Adventurer series?"
Jenna smiled and replied, "Don't you find Rabbit Chasel adorable? Furthermore, a messenger can encounter danger. Reading more about Gehrman Sparrow might make it stronger."
Franca had only briefly raised the issue but shifted her focus to unfolding the fake treasure map and letter, reading it with earnest attention.
"Wow, Lumian's efficiency is impressive. He aimed to punish Burman for his sins and managed to complete the hunt in less than twelve hours!
"The Beyonder characteristics didn't form Sealed Artifacts with mixed abilities; instead, they emerged and merged separately. Could it be because Burman no longer harbored madness and paranoia before his death, and his emotions had calmed down?"
"Heh heh, there's no need to inform 007 so quickly if we encounter similar cases in the future. Lumian might resolve it himself within a day. Everything will return to normal, and world peace

will prevail. That way, 007 won't blame me for always causing trouble for him."
Franca had previously informed Jenna that the code name of her collaborator among the authorities was 007.
So fast? Demon Warlock isn't weak... Jenna couldn't believe it.
That was a criminal with a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or. All the verl d'or she had seen so far added up to less!
Lumian's bounty amounted to less than 100,000.
Franca pursed her lips and remarked, "Think about his experiences in Trier and the items and abilities he possesses. He's simply a supermodel, alright? If he were to be released, it would be equivalent to a dimensional reduction strike on Beyonders without any special traits. He wouldn't be much inferior to most Sequence 5 Beyonders!"
Jenna recalled the dangerous situations she had faced alongside Lumian and nodded in agreement.
"What do you mean by dimensional reduction strike?"
Franca, slightly surprised by Jenna's question, took a moment before explaining, "It's akin to an adult bullying a child or a demigod bullying a Low-Sequence Beyonder.
"Furthermore, think about it. A half-mad Beyonder like the Demon Warlock is mentally, psychologically, emotionally, and physically problematic. He was completely countered by Lumian's Symphony of Hatred. When facing him, all you need to do is be wary of the strange combination of abilities and avoid provoking him into a monster. Lumian has the experience, so he won't be careless."
Jenna muttered, "Now that you mention it, why do I feel that killing the Demon Warlock isn't too difficult?"
"You can't put it that way. It can only be said that the forced switching of pathways will indeed make one very powerful and dangerous, but it also has huge flaws and many problems. It's easy to target," Franca corrected her before continuing reading Lumian's letter.
After she was done reading, Franca sighed with excitement and said, "The sea sounds so fun, and the scenery is beautiful. If it weren't for the mission, I'd want to be an adventurer at sea and hunt pirates!"
Jenna, leaning against the sofa and reading the letter from behind, felt a longing in her heart.
Who wouldn't love to travel? It was just that they hadn't had the luxury before.
Franca regained her composure and clicked her tongue.
"Lumian is truly generous. He actually donated all the bounty and spoils of war to establish a charity fund. Sigh, actually, I

understand his thoughts..."
Until now, she had been covertly providing for the family of her body's original owner until now.
As Franca and Jenna conversed, they both performed Magic Mirror Divination.
Their answers were unanimous: The map was real!
"Whether it's Burman or the immortal islander, Harrison, they both admit that a portion of this map is fake. It can't help adventurers reach Resurrection Island, and they might even encounter great danger along the way... What's fake about it?" Franca pondered, casting her gaze at the treasure map.
On the map, the location marked as Resurrection Island lay deep within the Fog Sea. The westernmost colonial island of the Intis Republic, Aroca, was still quite a distance away.
...
Can't distinguish the fake parts? Lumian shook his head after receiving the reply and continued reading the information about spirit world creatures in his hand.
His primary focus was to find any introduction to the Arden evil spirit that Burman had summoned from the depths of death.
Lumian flipped through the information until evening, satiating his hunger in his room. Grabbing the golden straw hat he had recently taken a liking to, he descended to the deck and entered the bar.
By that time, the Flying Bird had already departed Port Farim. As expected, Batna and his female companion sat at the bar counter, engaged in animated conversations with the surrounding passengers about Demon Warlock Burman's demise.
"We don't know which adventurer did it either. If it hadn't been officially announced, we wouldn't have known that Burman had been killed. No one in Port Farim's adventurer circle knew about it in advance!" Batna held the Lanti Proof and said excitedly, "To think that such a powerful adventurer remains hidden in Port Farim! Indeed, we can't be arrogant or conceited. Perhaps the tramp sitting by the roadside is a powerful figure!"
Spotting Lumian pushing his way through, Batna whistled.
"You're staying in first-class? Are you that rich?"
"I'm not considered rich," Lumian replied with a smile as he settled onto a barstool. "I just feel that accidents can happen at any moment at sea, and I can be killed by pirates at any moment. So, why not try to pamper yourself? What's the point of saving up money when you're dead? Since you're an adventurer, you have to lead a carefree life because who knows if there'll be a tomorrow."
"Since you're an adventurer, you have to lead a carefree life

because who knows if there'll be a tomorrow..." The female adventurer beside Batna whispered Lumian's last sentence, seemingly touched.
Batna took a sip of the Lanti Proof and chuckled.
"However, the prerequisite is that you have some savings. Otherwise, if you end up having fun today, you'll go hungry tomorrow.
"Man, 600,000 verl d'or. I wonder which adventurer obtained Burman's 600,000 verl d'or. And the items on him..."
Batna revealed a yearning and envious expression.
Lumian picked up the absinthe he had just requested and took a sip, savoring the faint bitterness lingering in the fragrance.
...
In the following days, the Flying Bird calmly navigated towards the Feynapotter Kingdom. Philip, the security supervisor, found it surreal.
Is the bad luck over? Did the major problem disembark? Did Demon Warlock Burman's death stem from the major problem entering Port Farim?
Just as Port Santa was only a day away, Philip observed his subordinate deliver a telegram.
"Boss, it's from your comrades in Port Farim." The subordinate handed the folded telegram to Philip.
What happened in Port Farim that requires me to be informed? Did the major problem cause trouble in Port Farim and trace it to the Flying Bird? He unfolded the telegram and scanned its contents.
"The adventurer who hunted Demon Warlock Burman is suspected to be on your ship. His name is Louis Berry."

Chapter 533: Forgotten

"His name is Louis Berry."

Philip's gaze froze at the last sentence.

Him?

He killed Demon Warlock?

Suddenly, Philip recalled the tragic scene of Room 5 in the first-class cabin as though it had been shelled.

Could it be that the clash between Louis Berry and Demon Warlock Burman had caused this devastation?

Rumors circulated that the Church of The Fool exchanged Burman's head for a bounty the following day, but procedures like that didn't happen instantaneously. A delay of half a day was ordinary!

Did Louis Berry truly kill Demon Warlock?

Is he truly that formidable? I couldn't discern it at all...

I understand he's a magnet for trouble, and various details attest to his strength and unpredictable nature, but the notion of him vanquishing Demon Warlock caught me by surprise. And he appeared unscathed.

He even contained the battle's impact within a single room, ensuring no one overheard anything...

Could he have also been the one who frightened off Bone Splitter Basil? No, he was near me and didn't make a move... Unless Basil knows him and comprehends his danger?

A person capable of eliminating Demon Warlock is indeed capable of deterring Bone Splitter... Even though Basil might not be weaker than Burman despite the relatively low bounty. Louis Berry, however, possesses the ability to silence Burman without a trace...

What caused the encounter with the Death Navigators?"

Philip muttered silently.

Though he couldn't fully embrace the idea that the young man who always boasted in the bar with a smile was a powerful enough adventurer to vanquish Demon Warlock, Philip hesitated to harbor too many doubts.

"Boss, should we... should we expose Louis Berry's identity as a fake?" the crew member who had delivered the telegram asked in a hushed tone.

Philip instinctively raised the paper bearing the telegram and delivered a light smack to his subordinate's head.

"Do you have a death wish? I've emphasized repeatedly, when faced with anomalies on the ship, turn a blind eye unless it's an immediate crisis, and wait until we reach our destination."

Philip pondered for a moment, concerned that his subordinate

might act in error due to misunderstanding or disbelief. He clarified deliberately, "We're still at sea. Even if we report the false identities now, confirming Louis Berry's true identity and existence won't save or aid us unless someone departs from Port Santa. Yet, such inter-country cooperation requires days of prior communication. By the time assistance arrives, Louis Berry will likely have disembarked.

"Moreover, verifying his real identity takes time. To blow the whistle successfully, we'd be risking Louis Berry noticing and retaliating. Is it worth it?

"I prefer to preserve the peace of these past few days."

The crew member pondered for a moment and ultimately concurred with the boss's decision.

Philip breathed a sigh of relief, tearing up the telegram and casually tossing it into the trash can.

"Inform the recipients and translators of the telegram to keep this information under wraps!" Philip instructed before leaving the room and descending the stairs to the deck.

Just as he was contemplating the romantic plans for the evening with his newfound lover, his thoughts came to a sudden halt when he spotted Louis Berry, the central figure of the telegram. There he stood by the shipboard, his gaze fixed on the gently undulating blue sea, idly twirling a golden straw hat in one hand while holding a glass of light golden champagne in the other.

As if sensing Philip's gaze, Lumian turned around, locking eyes with him.

A subtle smile played on Louis Berry's lips as he raised the champagne glass in his right hand, as though toasting him, before taking a leisurely sip.

Philip's body tensed, determined to conceal any change in expression.

Is Louis Berry merely extending a greeting, or does he possess knowledge about the telegram and my decision?

...

Waa! Waa! Waa!

White-headed seabirds soared gracefully under the pristine, blue sky, their cries distinct from those in Port Gati and Port Farim.

At times, they glided low, skimming past wooden fishing boats adorned with billowing white sails.

Fishing, a vital industry in Port Santa, instilled both fear and reverence for the sea in every fisherman's veins.

While they could have children who strayed from the beliefs of the Earth Mother, they couldn't bear descendants who dared to blaspheme the sacred sea prayer ritual.

Lumian, taking in the scenery different from the Intis port and Port Santa's gradually rising mountain range in the distance, silently offered praise to The Fool.
The journey from Port Farim to Port Santa unfolded surprisingly uneventfully
—no storms, no pirates, and no encounters with Beyonder incidents.
This respite allowed him a few days of tranquility. Lumian finished two foundational Highlander textbooks and perused information on spirit world creatures.
He failed to find a description of Arden, the evil spirit from the depths of death. Whether Madam Magician omitted the information or remained unaware of it remained uncertain.
"We'll be entering the port in half an hour." Lumian, who had been taking respite for the past few days, cracked his neck from the living room window of Cabin 5 in first class.
Here lay potential clues about the key members of April Fool's, Bard, and Ultraman!
Of course, it could also be a trap.
Lumian's body trembled slightly, filled with anticipation.
Finally, the Flying Bird smoothly docked at Port Santa.
Lumian, hand in hand with Ludwig and trailed by Lugano carrying their luggage, made their way towards the gangway. On the deck, they encountered Batna Comté and his companion Nolfi, already awaiting their turn.
Perhaps influenced by Lumian's words about seizing the moment as an adventurer, Nolfi, who had initially insisted on separate cabins, had moved in with Batna two days ago.
Batna's face radiated a flush of confidence as he waved and exclaimed, "Louis, you don't strike me as much of an adventurer. What adventurer brings their child out to sea?"
"Isn't it a common task for adventurers to protect their employers' children?" Lumian retorted with a smile.
In a sense, the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom was indeed his employer.
Batna, eyeing Ludwig, dressed in a young gentleman's attire and carrying a distinctive red school bag, found Lumian's explanation reasonable.
Yet, he couldn't help but wonder, how could the child's parents be so nonchalant about entrusting their son to an unfamiliar adventurer?
"At the same time, he's my godson," Lumian added.
Understanding dawned on Batna as he gestured towards the harbor below.

"Where do you plan to stay? Shall we attend the sea prayer ritual together?"
"I'm not sure yet. If the gods will it, our paths may cross again."
Lumian's demeanor shifted upon arriving at Port Santa, his nerves tightening. Casual disclosure of his whereabouts was no longer in his plans.
Batna, accustomed to Lumian's occasional seer-like words, detected nothing unusual. He sighed and said, "I hope our paths cross once more."
With a casual wave, Batna led Nolfi toward the ramp.
Lumian smiled and offered a parting reminder, "Do you know Highlander?"
"A bit," Batna replied, gesturing toward Nolfi, whose adorable features, black hair, and brown eyes spoke of her mixed Feynapotter and Intis heritage. "Her mother is a native of Port Santa. She carries blood from both Feynapotter and Intis."
Port Santa local... That explains your desire to experience the sea prayer ritual after learning about it. Lumian held his silence, watching as Batna and Nolfi descended the gangway with their suitcases.
"Not only is Louis generous and warm, but he also has a knack for humor. He appears quite professional," Batna commented before leaving the port district. Glancing back at the Flying Bird, he said to Nolfi, "He didn't disclose their lodging just now. Clearly, he's unwilling to unveil his employer's circumstances. He likely came to Port Santa to escort that child home."
Nolfi nodded gently.
"You shouldn't have asked. An adventurer's companions are only in the present. We might not cross paths again in the future."
"Haha, you've been influenced by Louis's life philosophy." Batna noticed a paperboy approaching and suggested to Nolfi, "Grab a few newspapers related to maritime rumors. We've been at sea for days, and we're out of the loop."
Nolfi shared the same idea, using degan copper coins she had exchanged prior for two newspapers.
Standing on the street, she unfolded the coastal port favorite, Five Seas News, and began reading its contents.
Batna, unfamiliar with Highlander, patiently waited for Nolfi to digest the news and relay the information to him.
Suddenly, Nolfi's eyes narrowed, and her grip on the newspaper tightened.
"What's wrong?" Batna asked curiously.
Nolfi hesitated before sharing, "There's a rumor in Port Farim that the adventurer who hunted the Demon Warlock is named..."

"What's his name?" Batna pressed.
Nolfi fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "His—his name is Louis Berry."
Louis, Louis Berry? Batna was taken aback.
...
Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano patiently waited for most passengers to disembark before making their exit.
As Lumian stepped off the gangway, his attention was drawn to a woman in a black nun's attire and matching hat. Carrying a brown suitcase, she turned into a fork in the road.
C-could it be the weeping woman I glimpsed through the Mystery Prying Glasses? Lumian pondered, averting his gaze thoughtfully.
As he moved forward, his mind raced with plans for the immediate future.
Firstly, he needed to find an inn in the harbor district. Secondly, he had to compose a letter to Madam Magician, notifying her of his arrival in Port Santa. The situation involved Celestial Worthy and potentially played into Loki's schemes. Carelessness was not an option.
Write a letter to Madam Magician...
Write a letter!
Lumian's pupils dilated as he sought to discern if the world ahead was real.
Throughout his days aboard the ship, he kept forgetting to write to Madam Magician!
He had intended to consult his Major Arcana card holder, questioning the significance of the frequent occurrences related to the Flying Bird's calamities.
Yet, he had completely forgotten about it!

Chapter 534: Over the Mountain

It was today, amidst Lumian's contemplation of his next moves, that he seemed to snap out of a dream-like trance. The recollection of his intention to write a letter to Madam Magician, now forgotten, hit him like a bullet.

The realization was more unsettling than a battlefield injury, sending shivers down his spine, and causing his hair to stand on end.

Had this situation escalated, he might have perished without even realizing it!

It feels like déjà vu... That's right! In Dardel, Lugano and I had unintentionally overlooked the option of escaping. We were searching for a pretext to enter the town and investigate Derangement. As Lumian's thoughts raced, a sudden revelation struck him.

The woman he had seen weeping on the Flying Bird was the source of Derangement—a humanoid Sealed Artifact that had escaped its restraints!

After leaving Dardel, she had reached Port Gati and boarded the Flying Bird.

Could she be instinctively influencing the minds of those around her, erasing thoughts that might pose a threat? But that would require her to monitor everyone's psychological activities at just the right time.

Or, as Anthony had speculated, did she naturally implant mental cues, causing observers to overlook her existence? Even if glimpsed, the memory of her would fade later. Simultaneously, any communication with High-
Sequence Beyonder powers would be 'actively' forgotten or abandoned. This classification wasn't determined by her but by the individual's self-
awareness. If they believed the person to be a High-Sequence Beyonder, then so they were...

Once she disembarked and ceased planting those natural and persistent cues, the overlooked issues could be recalled through other connections.

Fortunately, the Sealed Artifact remained dormant on the Flying Bird. Otherwise, I might have lost control and transformed into a monster...

Apart from me and Ludwig, she also played a part in scaring off Bone Splitter Basil? Heh heh, it's quite funny from the perspective of the notorious pirate. Choosing an ordinary merchant ship for plunder, Basil found himself faced with three escalating waves of

malice upon surfacing—a hornet's nest stirred into action. In that scenario, he had no other choice but to escape.
Were the strange Death Navigator fish also drawn by her presence?
Initially, Lumian felt lingering fear, but soon a sense of joy washed over him.
This revelation confirmed that his contribution to the calamities on the Flying Bird was minimal, just as Aurore had suggested. Throughout the journey, only the Demon Warlock incident could be attributed to him.
Lumian could accept such frequency.
With determination, Lumian retrieved a post-it note and fountain pen, hastily scribbling a memo:
"Find a nearby motel and write to Madam Magician. Focus on the death mark and the humanoid Sealed Artifact."
After folding the note and stowing it in his pocket, Lumian utilized Lugano's interactions with the dock's inhabitants to discreetly inquire about nearby motels. Lowering his voice, he addressed his left chest.
"Temiboros, you actually failed to notice such a dangerous Sealed Artifact nearby."
Termiboros's majestic voice resonated. "Why should I warn you?"
Lumian criticized, Oh, you've learned the art of sophistry... He turned to Ludwig, who was nibbling on a long piece of bread.
I wonder if this kid's lack of awareness stems from the Church of Knowledge's seal or a belief that there was no danger since the woman hadn't gone mad. I don't have to dwell on it for now... Averting his gaze, he waited for Lugano to gather directions before leading Ludwig toward the exit of the port district.
Port Santa stood divided, its territories sliced into thirds. One-third bustled with the comings and goings of fishermen, surrounded by a vast open space. Nearby, three ice mills hummed with activity. The remaining two-thirds, a realm reserved for merchant ships, witnessed a constant influx of passengers. Mechanical cranes labored tirelessly, lifting smelted steel, forged swords, and woven wool into the undercabin.
Amidst the pungent scent of fish, Lumian maintained an outward calm. Sometimes, his gaze wandered to the distant mountain range; other times, he scrutinized the billowing black smoke drifting from the southeast, carried downwind by the breeze.
Tasking Lugano and Ludwig with selecting two candidates each, Lumian delegated the decision-making. Ultimately, they settled at an unassuming motel named Solow.
In Highlander, "Solow" translated to "sun."

Although the Feynapotter Kingdom didn't subscribe to the Eternal Blazing Sun faith, instead venerating Earth Mother, the prevalence of sunlight in their environment resulted in the frequent use of words like "Solow" and "Soros" (sunlight) in various place names.
Lumian removed his golden straw hat, shielding him from the October sun, and secured a suite from the motel's owner—a gray-haired, tall figure with prominent cheekbones and a thick beard. The cost: 1.5 gold risot per day, or 3 verl d'or.
Official currencies in Feynapotter included risot, setta, and degan. Legend had it that before the kingdom's split from the south-central regions, the Church of Earth Mother and the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom jointly governed the land. Unlike the Loen Kingdom's unconventional gold pound system, Feynapotter's currency was designed by scholars from the Church of Knowledge. One risot equaled 10 settas, and one setta equaled 10 degans, denominated as five degans, whole degan, half degan, and a quarter degan. Currently, one risot was roughly 2 verl d'or, making 12 risot equivalent to approximately 1 gold pound.
Having exchanged for 1,000 risot, Lumian held a variety of settas and degans in his possession.
After settling the bill and ascending to his quarters, Lumian's attention was drawn to a young girl with long brown hair and freckles entering the establishment. She greeted the proprietor using the Highlander term for "grandfather."
The owner, his cheekbones tinged by the sun, warmly embraced the girl, their right cheeks meeting as he responded with a smile and a single word
unfamiliar to Lumian. Puzzled, he turned to Lugano, seeking an explanation with his eyes.
"Ol' Delva said, 'It's so good to see you, my little cabbage.'"
"Little cabbage..." Lumian echoed, taken aback by the term.
Lugano, with his pronounced eyebrows, large eyes, and sharp features, inquired with confusion, "Don't you know that there are many descendants of Dariège here?"
Positioned on the second-floor staircase, he gestured towards the wall outside.
"The distant mountain range is the Pyraez mountain range. You Dariège folks prefer calling it the Dariège mountain range."
At that moment, Lumian grasped the entirety of the situation.
"Is this south of the Dariège mountain range?"
"Southwest. The Dariège mountain range is a few hours away by train. In between, you'll find vast plains, pastures, and numerous towns and villages," Lugano clarified as he ascended the stairs. "As you might know, every autumn, shepherds from Dariège and

nearby areas migrate to the southern plains for grazing. Some settle down, while others seek opportunities in the larger surrounding cities, including Port Santa.
"If you head northeast, Highlander might not be necessary. Many people there are familiar with Intisian. I have a cousin who was a widow initially. Later, she met a local while shepherding and married him. She gave up grazing and helped the herdsmen develop businesses related to sheep, cheese, wool, and more. Eventually, they saved enough to start a vineyard. Her husband values her opinions. This might be an example of Feynapotter men. Unfortunately, I'm not a woman; otherwise, I might have converted to Earth Mother!"
Listening to Lugano's insights, Lumian recalled a piece of information Aurore had once shared.
The Dariège mountain range acted as a barrier against the cold winds heading south.
Consequently, the Gaia Province, situated south of the Dariège mountain range, enjoyed abundant sunlight and warm weather. Even in winter, the plains and pastures thrived with lush grass suitable for grazing. Lumian sensed that this knowledge had become "dynamic," forming a network that allowed him to comprehend the geographical and weather characteristics of Port Santa and its northeastern region.
Abruptly, another thought crossed his mind.
Could it be that most of the Beyonders captured by shepherds like Pierre, who believed in Inevitability, hailed from this area?
Given the presence of a thriving port and a mountain range rich in mineral deposits, it makes sense that there would be more Beyonders here...
If that were the case, perhaps my Hunter, Provoker, and even Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristics might have originated from this region.
I'm here now...
Why do I smell the scent of inevitability...
Lumian responded casually to Lugano's information, "How many children did your cousin have?"
"Three," Lugano replied.
"If she hadn't produced children, would her husband have been so obedient?" Lumian, aware of the beliefs of Earth Mother's faith, heard about these matters with the shepherds who frequented the pastures.
They held fertility and reproduction in high regard.
"Definitely not," Lugano affirmed without hesitation.
As the conversation unfolded, the trio ascended to the fifth floor,

entering a suite at the corridor's end.
Lumian strolled to the balcony, casting his gaze towards the rugged mountain range in the distance.
There lay a highlander pasture and Cordu.
After nearly fifteen minutes of silent contemplation, Lumian returned to his room and began composing letters to Madam Magician and Franca.
His intention was to inform Franca of the humanoid Sealed Artifact, urging her to alert the official Beyonders of the Feynapotter Kingdom through 007. A potentially hazardous pathogen capable of madness at any moment was not fit for roaming freely outside.
...
"Wow! See? What did I say? Lumian will definitely encounter the source of Derangement again!" exclaimed Franca as she was about to depart with Jenna when she received the letter.
They were heading to Trier's catacombs.
In the preceding days, Jenna harbored a desire to revisit Krismona Night Pillar, hoping to uncover something valuable. However, she hesitated to approach recklessly, fearing it might attract the suspicion of the Demoness Sect. Residing with Franca offered no guarantee of safety from their watchful eyes.
Thanks to Anthony's introduction, she finally secured a mission at a mysticism gathering, providing a valid pretext.
Her task involved venturing to a specific family's tomb on the catacombs' third level, retrieving an antique tearcatcher for her employer.

Chapter 535: Reply

Jenna completed reading Lumian's letter and lapsed into silence for a few moments before remarking,

"The origin of the Derangement is genuinely formidable... Lumian unknowingly endured its effects for nearly half a month."

Luckily, the woman's ailment didn't erupt. Otherwise, everyone on the ship would have descended into madness.

Jenna contemplated for a moment, convinced that if she were in Lumian's position, the outcome would be the same; nothing would alter.

"Hence, Sealed Artifacts above Level 2 wield immense power, but they're not practical for most situations. Their mere existence can bring catastrophe to the surrounding humans," Franca seized the chance to enlighten her companion, who had only been a Beyonder for half a year.

She conveyed this information to Madam Judgment, not 007. This decision arose from the unpredictability of the emergency communication methods. What if 007 happened to be occupied and didn't go to that location? Regular communication had to wait until after 10 p.m.

Considering the imminent threat of Derangement, Franca didn't want to waste valuable time. With Madam Judgment's real-world identity, contacting the official Beyonders of the Feynapotter Kingdom was assured—no worries about not locating her. Come nightfall, she would notify 007, ensuring the message reached the right people.

With this matter settled, Franca and Jenna reached the catacombs in a rented carriage.

Having followed Lumian to the third level, they had drawn valuable information from him. The place was now familiar to them. Soon, they entered a small square illuminated by burning white candles and adorned with two sacrificial pillars.

Jenna reflected for a moment and, to Franca's confusion, approached the sacrificial pillar representing the Eternal Blazing Sun. She outstretched her arms and reverently declared, "Praise the Sun!"

She was seeking protection.

Franca couldn't help but twitch her lips as she observed the scene. Amused, she remarked,

"Why are you becoming more and more like Ciel—uh, Lumian?"

"Dammit! How do I resemble him?" Jenna retorted instinctively.

"In terms of faith flexibility," Franca pointed out with a smile. "Like me, I only praise Mr. Fool. I didn't say anything like 'By Steam.'"

Jenna pondered for a moment and admitted, "Because Lumian and I once truly believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun..."
Suddenly, she halted, her lips moving as she cursed herself.
Am I admitting that I do resemble Lumian?
Franca had only been teasing. After praising The Fool, she left the sacrificial square with Jenna and headed towards the entrance of the fourth level, where the Krismona Night Pillar stood.
Thanks to Lumian's information, they navigated past the skeletal "blockage" on the road. In the dim environment, they moved cautiously, guided by the faint candlelight.
As Franca walked, an idea crossed her mind.
"Do you think we have to hold the lit white candles in our hands? Can we hold them above our heads or make a lantern and place them inside? Will this also protect us?"
Accustomed to Franca's occasional peculiar thoughts, Jenna casually replied, "You can give it a try."
After considering the potential consequences of a failed experiment, Franca chuckled dryly.
"Forget it, forget it. No need to be curious about such things."
She looked at Jenna beside her and changed the subject.
"Why are you dressed like this?"
Jenna, now in a black dress and a dark bonnet, exuded a beauty that carried a touch of maturity beyond her years.
Jenna instinctively scanned the surroundings for any dim yellow candles before whispering,
"I'm playing the part of a Witch to add a mysterious touch."
Clad in a black robe with a hood, she might resemble the witches known to humans, but it could easily raise suspicion from the Demoness Sect, so Jenna found a compromise.
Franca quickly grasped the situation and nodded in approval. "You've put in the effort."
Seizing the moment, Jenna inquired, "What about you? Since Gardner's demise, have you not found an opportunity to digest Pleasure with someone?"
Franca, usually thick-skinned, felt a bit embarrassed by Jenna's words. She coughed twice and replied, "It's not difficult to find someone if I wanted. If it doesn't work out, I'll turn down Browns at an opportune moment and see if she takes offense. Heh heh, if she truly experiences pleasure, she might invite me to join her..."
Franca suddenly shut her mouth, wishing she could raise her right hand and slap herself.
Why did I disclose all this to Jenna?
What a disgrace!
Clearing her throat, Franca said, "Besides, this presents an

opportunity."
"Opportunity?" Jenna was puzzled.
Franca nodded solemnly.
"Relying solely on the matters in bed and physical pleasure can indeed slowly digest the potion. It also aligns with the negative characteristics of a Demoness. However, I keep feeling that the meaning of Pleasure shouldn't be limited to this. Taking advantage of the absence of a target for physical pleasure, I want to calm down and slowly experience and explore other possibilities.
"For instance, captivating a man's heart. Bringing joy merely by being around me. Providing pleasure through interaction, yet beyond his reach. Each encounter becomes a torment, a glimpse into the catastrophe and affliction a Demoness brings...
"Dammit, I despise such women the most!"
Franca's frustration blazed as she spoke.
Jenna was taken aback, her lips pursed, her body trembling slightly as she struggled to contain her laughter.
"Something along those lines. At any rate, that's the gist," Franca abruptly concluded the conversation.
In the dim candlelight, Franca passed by a newly constructed tomb beside an ancient one. A sudden frown creased her forehead, questioning if she had missed an opportunity.
If I had sighed and hinted at the stagnation of my digestion due to the absence of a pleasure partner, would Jenna offer sympathy and assistance?
Argh, my stubbornness has cost me!
But perhaps she'd suggest Lumian...
Franca's thoughts raced, but she remained vigilant, especially when she noticed the jumbled bones strewn along the roadside.
Finally, she and Jenna reached the Krismona Night Pillar, a black marble structure supporting the cave's ceiling.
No etchings or signs of erosion adorned its surface.
Franca studied it for a moment and remarked, "It's reminiscent of the one in Fourth Epoch Trier, albeit smaller. More like a tip."
Turning to Jenna, she inquired, "Do you sense anything peculiar?"
Furrowing her brow, Jenna shook her head slowly.
"No."
...
Feynapotter Kingdom, Gaia Province, Port Santa, Solow Motel.
Lumian swiftly received a response from Madam Magician:
"Have you faced the dread of a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact?
"Repeating it won't imprint as deeply as experiencing it firsthand.
"This likely is the power of a High-Sequence Beyonder in the Spectator pathway, constantly shaping the thoughts and

perceptions of those around. Remember: 'Beware of the Spectator'...
"The Sealed Artifact has other powers. I'm uncertain if it belongs to the evil gods outside. For now, you needn't pursue or capture it. We'll liaise with the Earth Mother Church through Mr. Moon."
Reading this, Lumian muttered to himself, I'd rather not get involved, but it's not my call. Sometimes, my nature thrusts me into things I'd rather avoid.
It was just like him and the Sealed Artifact being on the same voyage, headed for the same destination.
Simultaneously, Lumian gleaned a vital detail from Madam Magician's arrangements.
Mr. Moon of the Tarot Club had close ties with the Earth Mother Church.
After a moment's reflection, Lumian resumed reading the letter.
"We're also probing Resurrection Island's existence. Mr. Hanged Man and Madam Hermit are leading the investigation. They have theories but can't confirm yet. If they need your aid, they'll inform you and seek your consent. However, don't search for Resurrection Island now. It's very dangerous. Remember, very dangerous...
"The death mark is a lingering essence of death. Ordinary humans leave one mark; certain Sequences of certain pathways can leave many. Such marks erode and merge with death, lasting longer for those higher in status or with special abilities. As for ordinary Low-Sequence Beyonders, the corresponding death mark won't exist for anything beyond a few years.
"Setting up a ritual to summon the death mark is nearly impossible. Even a Sequence 0 true god wouldn't dare approach the essence of death, let alone with a ritual.
"I suspect something amiss with the Arden evil spirit Burman summoned. The decline in Burman's mental state may have started with that spirit, not his encounter with Harrison of Resurrection Island.
"Perhaps, the Arden evil spirit isn't dead."
The Arden evil spirit, leaving behind blood traces and easily dispatched by Burman, isn't dead? What an absurd storyline... Even Madam Magician remains clueless about the nature of this creature. Recollecting Burman's encounter, Lumian couldn't detect anything abnormal.
This behavior seemed like that of a half-mad individual, forcibly transitioning between pathways.
In her closing remarks, Madam Magician cautioned: "Exercise caution during your investigations in Port Santa. Should you encounter any difficulties, don't hesitate to seek aid from the Knight of Swords."

There's no need for that for now... Lumian replied inwardly.
This stemmed from a lack of leads or information. Even if he were to correspond with the Knight of Swords, Lumian wouldn't know what to inquire about or what kind of assistance to request.

Chapter 536: One in the Light and One in the Dark

Lumian's immediate priority upon reaching Port Santa was to delve into the events of the previous sea prayer ritual, particularly focusing on the individuals involved in the accident. This investigation would be crucial in uncovering the true identities of the key members of April Fool's.

However, this phase of his pursuit carried inherent risks of deception and potential traps.

Understanding the intricacies of last year's prank was paramount before engaging the Minor Arcana—Knight of Swords—in any assistance. Lumian didn't find it plausible to enlist aid on such matters.

The sealed knowledge surrounding the events in Port Santa made it apparent that unless the Knight of Swords happened to be present, he wouldn't yield much help.

Initially, Lumian aimed to gather information about the sea prayer ritual and the previous year's incident, but such details seemed exclusive to this location. Peripheral members of April Fool's, involved in minor roles, offered limited perspectives, offering mere snippets of the puzzle.

With a flick of his wrist, Lumian transformed Madam Magician's reply into a blazing fireball.

Exiting the master bedroom of the suite, he addressed Lugano, who waited in the living room, "Let's get ourselves a local identity."

"You've already used Louis Berry's identity to check into the motel," Lugano reminded Lumian after some thought.

Did this mean it's time to depart?

Wouldn't that be a waste of an entire week's rent?

Lugano's heart ached at the thought of the 10.5 gold risot.

Spending money wasn't an issue; just don't waste it!

As a bounty hunter who had lived a tough life for many years, he was quite sensitive to money. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been so thick-skinned as to ask Lumian for a "job."

"Any issues?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

In the October warmth of Port Santa, Lumian sported a straightforward ensemble—light linen shirt, brown pants, a golden straw hat cradled in his grasp.

For a moment, Lugano didn't know if he should voice his primary concern—

the matter of money. Finally, he decided to broach the subject.

"Boss, I grabbed a few newspapers from the street. Seems there are rumors in Port Farim about you taking down the Demon Warlock."

Upon reading this news, Lugano rubbed his eyes several times,

wondering if he had read wrongly.
When had his boss eradicated the Demon Warlock?
Why don't I know?
Only the memory of the seemingly bombarded master bedroom stirred skepticism.
"It was me," Lumian replied with a slight nod.
"..." Lugano momentarily lost the ability to organize his words.
After a brief pause, he suppressed his curiosity and feigned understanding.
"You've bagged a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or and some spoils of war. No wonder you've been throwing money around lately..."
The rent of 20 to 30 verl d'or didn't seem extravagant anymore.
"All donated," Lumian disclosed matter-of-factly.
"Why?" Lugano blurted out.
Lumian glanced at him.
Lugano immediately shut his mouth and smiled sheepishly.
"We need to change our location. Louis Berry's fame in the Fog Sea makes him an easy target."
In that gaze, Lumian conveyed an unspoken message:
Who's in charge here? You or me?
Did I need your approval to donate the bounty?
With a subtle smile, Lumian posed the question, "Who said we were relocating?"
Lugano, caught off guard, stammered, "Not relocating..."
Lumian's smile held a cryptic meaning as he shared, "Why else do you think I didn't ask the clergyman from the Church of The Fool, who helped collect the bounty, to conceal my identity?"
Louis Berry, the high-profile adventurer, served as a beacon, attracting attention and revealing the landscape of potential threats.
Lumian needed an inconspicuous local guise to operate discreetly in the shadows.
Lugano, grappling with the complexity of his employer's motives, confessed, "I-I thought you just wanted to be as famous as Gehrman Sparrow in the Five Seas." He sensed there was more beneath the surface.
Lumian chuckled.
"Who among our generation wouldn't want to match Gehrman Sparrow's fame in the Five Seas?"
The desire for recognition satisfied his vanity, providing a plausible reason for not letting Theis, the Church of The Fool's bishop, conceal his identity completely.
A superficial motive—one genuine enough to make people believe—could effectively veil hidden intentions.

"Uh..." Lugano, feeling like he couldn't decipher Lumian's true colors or grasp his ultimate goal, sighed inwardly.
Sigh, I'm just a Planter, a Doctor, and a seasoned bounty hunter. My intelligence can only be considered ordinary...
Lumian cast a glance at Ludwig, munching on a potato omelet, and declared, "Let's go."
He nudged the coat rack into a blind spot, hanging the golden straw hat, creating the illusion of an inconspicuous figure if one looked from the opposite building.
Exiting the Solow Motel, Lumian strolled along the grayish-white stone street toward the lively bars near the harbor. Lugano followed, holding Ludwig's hand.
The ancient street boasted mottled houses with white walls and red tiles. Near entrances like Cordu, elderly women chatted in the sun, but they didn't lend a hand in catching lice.
Passersby tread softly, lowering their voices to maintain the tranquility of the scene.
In a casual exchange with Francesco, the bartender at the Flying Bird's basement bar, Lumian learned of a cultural phenomenon in Feynapotter, shaped by the Earth Mother's faith and the significance accorded to family traditions: "Matriarchal culture."
Within each family, the most venerable grandmother, a prolific progenitor, commanded unparalleled respect. As the unquestionable "parent," they wielded a certain degree of control over every family member. Even outside the confines of their homes, this reverence persisted, for these grandmothers represented the familial symbol, embodying the Earth Mother.
The combination of religious beliefs and societal norms secured a unique status for these elderly grandmothers.
Observing this dynamic, Lumian found himself contemplating a question.
In Riston Province, a married woman, functioning as a de facto parent, held the right to be addressed as "Madame" and have her name prefixed with "Na." Could this tradition be an influence from Feynapotter's matriarchal culture just a mountain away?
Nomadic herdsmen and traders, traversing vast distances, inevitably brought back tales of their experiences. Ancient practices from the Darìège mountain range and its surroundings, spanning over a millennium, undoubtedly left an indelible mark.
Navigating the ancient yet serene streets under the brilliant sunlight, Lumian felt a sense of displacement. It was as if he had returned to Cordu during the bustling season when adults toiled in the fields, tended to sheep in the mountains, or embarked on hunting expeditions, leaving only an old woman and young

children behind.
...
Trier, third level of the catacombs.
Jenna closed her eyes and extended her senses, but the black Krismona Night Pillar remained silent, devoid of any sighs or motion.
Assessing the Mirror Substitutions, she cautiously approached the enigmatic weather-free pillar, placing her palm against it.
The black pillar that supported the cave's ceiling, though cold and metallic, retained the texture of rock.
Yet, Jenna's probing mind received nothing beyond this information.
"It still doesn't work," she communicated to Franca, shaking her head.
In her reflections, Jenna recalled the two instances and sought their commonality when she had heard Krismona's voice—during her advancement and within a special mirror world in Fourth Epoch Trier.
Both times, danger and intense emotions had been common denominators.
Jenna whispered, "The danger during my Witch advancement was suppressed by the sacrificial square. Is the key intense emotions?"
Jenna pondered aloud, delving into memories of painful events that had stirred her emotions,
including her mother's death, separation from her brother, and other poignant experiences of suffering.
Despite the visible fluctuations in her emotions, the Krismona Night Pillar remained silent, the illusory sigh elusive.
Franca, after a moment's contemplation, suggested, "Must there be a special event to trigger it?"
"Perhaps," Jenna replied, biting her lip. "Why don't we try the fourth level? Lumian mentioned the shadow suspected to have formed after the death of the Demoness pathway's Angel. That should be Krismona."
Franca's heart stirred, and she affirmed, "That's right. Moreover, the shadow is controlled by the seal and doesn't have the ability to attack humans. Yes, the prerequisite is that we strictly adhere to the series of rules in the catacombs."
After a brief discussion, the two of them circled around the Krismona Night Pillar, replaced candles, and proceeded to descend the ancient, mottled stone steps. Under the watchful gaze of realistic dark-gray reliefs depicting human heads on both sides of the rock walls, they descended step by step.
Breaking the suffocating silence, Franca spoke up, "This place is

perfect for ghost stories. The atmosphere is amazing."
Jenna glanced at her, teasing, "Are you afraid?"
"How is that possible?" Franca retorted stubbornly.
Jenna chuckled.
"If you weren't afraid, you'd just tell ghost stories to scare me. Now, you're just sighing. It means you mainly want to rely on your voice to boost your courage."
It's a waste of your talent not to choose the Spectator pathway... Do theater actors have to learn to read people? Franca was about to argue when they reached the last ancient stone step.
Simultaneously, a sense of oppression enveloped them.
In the next moment, a yellowish candle flame flickered in their eyes.
The candle flame didn't belong to them. It emerged from the distant fourth level of the catacombs.

Chapter 537: Charm

Franca and Jenna's initial reaction was to steer clear of the newcomer. In this subterranean maze filled with corpses, they couldn't afford to be complacent with the living.

Yet, their circumstances didn't permit avoidance. They had to wield a glowing white candle, a feeble defense against the encroaching darkness of the catacombs. The candle's flame, though, made them conspicuous, a visible beacon in the shadows. True concealment required them to find solace behind the sealed doors of an ancient tomb.

The option of becoming invisible or lurking in the shadows was risky—they weren't certain if it meant snuffing out the candle flame.

After a silent exchange of glances, Franca and Jenna chose to take a circuitous route, maintaining a safe distance from the distant candlelight.

In the oppressive stillness that felt like time itself had halted, the two Demonesses cautiously progressed westward, guided by road signs and the black lines on the cave ceiling.

As they approached a point parallel to the candle flame, Franca turned her head to peer down the corridor between the ancient tombs.

Thanks to her exceptional night vision, she identified the person clutching the burning candle.

A man in a black robe—deep black and light hues intermingled in his hair, a gentle profile, pale-white skin, and dark brown eyes, distinct from the Intisians.

Feynapotterian? Strikingly similar, yet subtly different. *Why do I sense familiarity? When have I encountered this person before?* Did he leave an impression in the memory recesses of the original owner of my body? Franca felt an inexplicable urge to approach and strike up a conversation.

She took a deep breath and suppressed it.

In the hushed darkness of the catacombs, approaching strangers recklessly could easily spark unnecessary conflict.

Franca had dedicated considerable time to delve into the circumstances surrounding the original body's demise and the person's life experiences. She sought to ensure there were no lingering issues that she needed to be wary about acquaintances from the past.

The man in the black robe, having observed the two Demonesses and noting their lack of intent to draw near, continued on his path, eventually disappearing behind an ancient tomb.

"He doesn't look like a college student." Jenna averted her gaze and eliminated an option.
If the individual hadn't ventured into the fourth level of the catacombs merely driven by curiosity and excitement, it hints at a clear motive. Is he on a commissioned search for antiques, paying respects to an ancestor buried on this level, or a Beyonder delving into the mysticism and seal composition of the catacombs? Perhaps, like Jenna and myself, he pursues the revelations from the three night pillars. Franca's mind raced through various possibilities.
On the fourth level of the catacombs, two more night pillars awaited: Marianne's Night Pillar and Lius's Night Pillar.
The former, the pope of the Evernight Goddess Church in the Fourth Epoch, and the latter, the Blessed of the ancient Death. Both had met their demise during the War of the Four Emperors inside Fourth Epoch Trier.
Having shared her analysis with Jenna, Franca gestured with her right hand, the one without a candle, and reassured, "Don't worry about his motives. It won't affect our search for Krismona's shadow."
I didn't want to bother either. You were the one considering all the possibilities... I sensed that impulse in your heart. Did you truly want to investigate that person just now? Jenna, attuned to Franca's nuances, grasped her companion's thoughts but chose to chuckle, keeping the revelation to herself.
At times, Franca could be quite prideful!
After walking along the path for nearly fifteen minutes, they reached a natural cave named Crazy Mushroom Cave.
The entrance was sealed by a dense cluster of pale-white mushrooms tinged with black.
"Why are there so many mushrooms?" Franca observed them with curiosity.
Before Jenna could respond, she continued, "Alright, alright, alright. I get it. Now's not the time for exploration and adventure."
"Dammit, I didn't stop you. Maybe Krismona's shadow is in the mushroom cave." Jenna, feeling stifled since entering the fourth level of the catacombs, vented her discomfort with coarse language, as if confined in a space that oppressed her.
Franca was on the verge of responding when her attention fixated on a figure standing at the corner ahead.
Clad in a simple and unadorned white robe, the figure boasted smooth black hair, exquisite facial features, and a holy aura. Her beauty transcended the surroundings of darkness, silence, and filth, as if she had emerged from the depths of human

imagination,
Krismona! The name resonated simultaneously in the minds of Franca and Jenna.
They had indeed stumbled upon a shadow suspected to be a High-Sequence Beyonder—the Demoness, Krismona!
Regaining her composure, Jenna locked eyes with the figure and attempted to speak in ancient Hermes, "Hello."
The woman's beauty was otherworldly, captivating everyone's attention. A faint smile graced the corners of her mouth.
Her allure was fully unleashed.
Entranced by that smile, Jenna and Franca found themselves lost, their minds fixated on a singular thought: Approach her, approach her...
Like moths drawn to a flame, fully aware of the dangers that lay in her beauty, yet compelled to draw near.
One step, two steps, three steps... The two Demonesses, eyes filled with fascination, advanced toward the woman in the simple white robe.
As they walked on, Jenna couldn't help but instinctively sigh and feel a sense of pity.
Why did she sigh when she has such a beautiful smile?
Had she encountered something sorrowful?
Sigh...
Jenna snapped out of her daze, realizing that the woman in the white robe might not be the same as Krismona, who had sighed and protected them. At the very least, she wasn't entirely the same!
Her vision cleared instantly, revealing the beautiful figure's soft black hair billowing. Each strand had become unusually thick, and the top had split open, resembling a snake opening its mouth.
The pitch-black snake's mouth faced Jenna and Franca, seemingly poised for their approach.
Jenna's heart skipped a beat. She swiftly grabbed Franca and whispered, "Something's amiss!"
Franca, initially taken aback, struggled for a few seconds before breaking free from her enchantment.
Coming to a sudden halt, they watched as the holy figure in the white robe stared blankly for a moment before bifurcating into a fork and vanishing into the darkness.
Phew... Franca exhaled, her fear lingering as she remarked, "Why isn't there a rule in the catacombs guidelines that prohibits communication with those who don't hold candles?"
"Perhaps ordinary humans, if they enter the fourth level, will be affected by the environment, unable to suppress their fear and

leaving quickly without encountering these shadows," Jenna offered an explanation.
Franca glanced at her with frustration and said, "You managed to break free from the female ghost's charm before I did."
Jenna recounted the thoughts that had recently crossed her mind.
"But I also heard Krismona's sigh and words in Fourth Epoch Trier..." Franca raised her right hand and touched her face. "Am I really more easily enamored with beauty?"
At this point, a sudden puzzlement overcame her.
"Actually, I've always found it strange that Krismona Night Pillar stands in the catacombs.
"As for the other two night pillars, one belongs to the Church of Evernight's former pope, Marianne, and the other is named after the ancient Death's Blessed, Lius. The latter is the Death Consul, which is very compatible with the catacombs. The former should be on the neighboring pathway of Death. In other words, they are closely related to death, home, and the dead. Krismona is the Demoness of Catastrophe, clearly distinct from them.
"I can understand why there was a giant pillar representing Krismona in Fourth Epoch Trier. That's because there's a special mirror world there. It contains the Primordial Demoness's divine power left behind during the War of the Four Emperors. However, why was Krismona Night Pillar included in the catacombs' construction? Back then, an Angel who followed the Blood Emperor perished. Why did it have to be Her?"
Jenna shook her head slowly and redirected her gaze to the spot where the holy figure had vanished.
She attempted to walk a distance in that direction and suddenly realized that the spot where the white-robed woman had been standing was an ancient tomb.
Unlike the other tombs on the fourth floor, its tomb door was open.
...
After departing Rue Aquina, home to the Solow Motel, Lumian found an empty alley and casually tossed the Lie earring to Lugano.
"Find someone skilled in crafting false identities. Change your appearance, and don't use your current look." Lumian gestured towards the café diagonally opposite. "I'll be waiting for you there."
"Yes, Boss." Lugano displayed no sign of worry.
Despite being unfamiliar with this city, he had numerous acquaintances residing here.
Moreover, he was fluent in Highlander.
As Lumian observed the translator-guide completing his disguise,

returning Lie, and heading toward Rue des Bars, he led Ludwig into the café, where each table was adorned with a bouquet of flowers.
The sun bore down, rendering the passersby somewhat languid.
Unfazed, Lumian, armed with his limited knowledge of Highlander words and gestures, successfully ordered two cups of Torres coffee with milk, a Santa yolk pastry with cream fashioned into a tower, roasted suckling pig, and duck stewed in pear juice.
Ludwig was pleased.
Sipping his coffee, Lumian surveyed the café. He noticed that the six or seven tables were occupied mainly by couples in their twenties, engaged in dates. There was only one middle-aged couple.
With Lumian's acute hearing, it wasn't challenging for him to catch snippets of conversations at nearby tables, even though he didn't comprehend most of it. Only a few words stood out.
"Ocean... Pray... Going aboard... Island..."
Could they be discussing the sea prayer ritual next month? Lumian mused, shifting his gaze out the window.
On the street, two young men with long swords on their backs engaged in a heated argument for some reason. Drawing their swords on the spot, they seemed poised for a duel.

Chapter 538: Historical Origins

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Even through the glass window, Lumian heard the clash of two lads' swords outside.

He couldn't help but raise his eyebrows.

They're really fighting?

Though duels were popular in Trier, it was rare for them to wield weapons without the formalities. Normally, they'd go through the entire process: determine the type of duel—cold weapons or revolvers—sign a contract, find a recognized witness, and then borrow weapons from the café's front desk or the bar counter. Only these duels were legal, avoiding police intervention.

But wielding a longsword at the slightest disagreement was either a prelude to riot or a mob vendetta. Such lethal weapons rarely surfaced in real fights.

Port Santa, or rather, the Feynapotter Kingdom's security is so poor? Lumian was surprised by this.

From the Flying Bird to the Solow Motel, he noticed the locals' penchant for carrying blades and swords, reminiscent of scenes from classical novels.

It was actually legal!

In a maritime colony like Port Farim, openly carrying such items was unheard of. Even a dagger had to be concealed.

For him, though, this was a welcome advantage.

Fascinated, Lumian observed the desperate struggle between the two lads through the window, occasionally commenting on their combat techniques in his mind.

Suddenly, a group of people jogged over from the street.

All women, they wore black cloth hats with white patterns, black lining, and brown leather armor. Dark cloaks adorned with two crossed swords, and brass revolvers strapped to their waists completed their attire.

The woman leading the group seemed to be in her late twenties, with thick, naturally curly black hair, thick eyebrows, large eyes, and plump red lips—

quite beautiful.

Standing at over 1.7 meters tall, she drew a straight sword from her back and called out to the two men fighting on the street with a cold expression.

Lumian only understood the word "stop."

The two lads truly ceased their actions, standing by the street and accepting the reprimand from the group of women, their imposing demeanor fading.

After a few minutes, they left separately with their swords, not being apprehended.
Lumian took a sip of his Torres coffee, perplexed by the situation.
The language barrier proved quite troublesome.
After Ludwig polished off the food on the table at a controlled speed, Lugano, now sporting an unremarkable face, returned.
Lumian wasn't in a hurry to inquire if he had found a black-market merchant who could craft fake identities. He casually asked, "Is it legal to possess cold weapons in Port Santa?"
Lugano lowered his round-rimmed black hat and dropped his voice.
"That's right. It's a local custom. The Feynapotter Kingdom government respects this tradition. Besides, it's a good thing for them to have more people die in the Gaia Province."
"Why?" Lumian inquired with interest.
Lugano covered his face with his hand, as if afraid of being followed.
Observing this, Lumian tossed him the Lie earring.
Lugano hurried to the washroom and reverted to his original appearance, albeit his facial features becoming more refined.
Only then did he relax and explain, "Have you ever heard of the Battle of the Violated Oath?"
Lumian, shaped by Aurore's rigorous education, instinctively replied, "The Battle of the Violated Oath that began in the Fifth Epoch in 738? The one where Lenburg, Masin, Segar, and other small south-central countries were separated from the north of the Feynapotter Kingdom, and the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom broke off from the Church of Earth Mother?"
Lugano was taken aback.
"Yes."
He only had a rough idea. The other party had actually revealed the exact year and final outcome.
After a few seconds, Lugano lowered his voice and said, "During the Battle of the Violated Oath, the entire Gaia Province, especially those near the Dariège mountain range, attempted to gain independence but failed.
"Later, in order to guard against the natives, despite high-quality iron and coal mines just south of the Dariège Mountains, the Feynapotter Kingdom only set up smelting factories and no gun factories. There wasn't a single native in the troops stationed here; they were all assigned to other places.
"Was there once a widespread belief in the God of Knowledge and Wisdom here?" Lumian couldn't help but glance at Ludwig, who was enjoying dessert.

The key to the independence of Lenburg, Masin, Segar, and other countries in the south-central region was their mainstream faith in the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, not the Earth Mother.
"I don't know," Lugano honestly shook his head.
Undeterred, he pressed on with the matter at hand.
"You should already know that the ancient Gaia Province mainly comprised four types of people. Firstly, farmers. Secondly, fishermen from places like Port Santa. Thirdly, mountain dwellers who relied on minerals and hunting to survive. Fourthly, the herdsmen you're familiar with. The latter three are fierce, wielding swords fearlessly in conflicts."
Lumian nodded.
That was indeed the case.
Whether fishermen, mountain dwellers, or herdsmen, they all lived in relative poverty. They battled nature's cruelty and faced various dangers beyond human settlements. They even had to be wary of those among them with ill intentions. Swords and blades were necessities, not ornaments.
Lumian had heard firsthand from the migrating herdsmen about wolf pack attacks and the brutality of bandits. It had left a deep impression on him.
Lugano downed the lemonade he had just ordered and sighed in relief.
"One of Earth Mother's three combat orders is stationed permanently in Gaia Province. They guard against us in the north and Lenburg in the northeast. Simultaneously, they aim to monitor the locals.
"Heh heh, encountering combat nuns in Gaia Province and Port Santa isn't uncommon. Their demeanors differ from other women..."
Lugano's expression shifted to one of leisure and fascination.
The team just now were the combat nuns who maintain order? Lumian realized.
He teased Lugano with a smile, "They're nuns."
Lugano smiled enigmatically and remarked, "The nuns of the Earth Mother Church don't take vows of chastity. Instead, they pledge to have as many children as possible before a certain age. If they're interested in you, they'll be quite proactive. Sometimes, they might even push a bit. The young folks here love showcasing their bravery in front of these nuns. Their courage might catch someone's eye."
Pledging to have numerous children before a certain age... It sounds peculiar, aligning with Earth Mother's teachings but reminiscent of another Mother. Local customs, governmental

involvement, religious doctrines, and primal courtship behaviors has all woven into the folklore of this place where cold weapons rule the streets. Lumian hadn't expected such complexity behind a seemingly trivial matter.
Upon reflection, it was rather intriguing.
At that moment, Lumian suddenly understood Aurore's words from the past.
"If I return to university without life's pressures, I'd study history."
Phew... Lumian exhaled slowly and turned to Lugano, "Any progress?"
Lugano, still lost in thoughts about combat nuns, was caught off guard and struggled to snap out of his reverie.
"You Intisians..." Lumian clicked his tongue.
Only then did Lugano grasp the question. He sheepishly smiled and said,
"I've made some. I've found a well-connected black-market merchant who can help.
"Would you like to meet them? He's also a descendant of Darième."
"Sure." Lumian finished his coffee and stood up.
...
Trier, fourth level of the catacombs.
Jenna and Franca each gripped a burning white candle, their eyes fixed on the ancient tomb that lay open, hesitant to advance.
No one knew what lay buried inside, and the fear of something terrifying emerging lingered in the air.
In the outer world, the two Demonesses could employ divination to discern the situation. However, in the catacombs, establishing a close connection with the ordinary spirit world was nearly impossible. The outcome was evident.
After all, Lumian couldn't enter through Spirit World Traversal, but he could "teleport" within its confines.
After a brief pause, Franca passed her Mirror Substitution to Jenna and stepped forward with solemn determination. Relying on her spiritual premonition, she cautiously approached the ancient tomb.
As they drew nearer, the dim yellow candlelight revealed a heap of pale-white bones in the entrance area, adorned with light greenish-black mold spots.
Franca raised the white candle, casting its light into the depths of the tomb.
Skeletons lay scattered in disarray, occupying every inch of the ground. In the center, a tilted sarcophagus revealed a multitude of decaying bones.
Franca hesitated for a moment before declaring, "It doesn't seem

dangerous."
Only then did Jenna approach, returning the Mirror Substitution.
Franca continued her observation and remarked, "Nothing of value either."
Gems and other items were absent among the burial articles, likely lost during the construction of the catacombs and the opening of these ancient tombs. Everything else had decayed or shattered. Even the murals on the walls bore only faint traces.
Jenna observed for a while and said uncertainly, "What about the area where these bones are pressing down?"
"Let me take a look." Franca moved closer, allowing invisible spider silk to spread and entwine the pale-white bones at the entrance, aiding in their movement.
Suddenly, an irregular mirror fragment, seemingly coated in black paint, materialized in the flames.
Jenna and Franca's eyes narrowed.
It bore a striking resemblance to the Mirror World Fragment they had obtained in Fourth Epoch Trier!
"Did a special Mirror Person once die here?" Franca mused. "Did Krismona's shadow appear here to inform us? But why did She attack us?"
Jenna shared the perplexity. After a moment of thought, she said, "Why did the special Mirror Person die here? Who owns this tomb? Or rather, which ancient family does it belong to?"
Franca stared for a moment before nodding solemnly.
"That might be our next investigation."
Finding no anomalies, the duo stored away the mirror fragment. Utilizing the formless spider silk of the Demoness of Pleasure, they meticulously searched the entire tomb but found nothing that identified the tomb owner.
Franca sighed and said, "Well, we'll unravel it when we get back. Let's go acquire an antique tearcatcher for the employer now."

Chapter 539: Information on the Sea Prayer Ritual

In Port Santa, inside a room featuring a lone card table,
Lumian and Lugano, their appearances altered and attire changed, met the black-market merchant claiming lineage to Dariège.
Seated at the head of the table, he sported a white shirt and a black vest, a glass of pale malt-colored white wine at his fingertips and a slowly burning cigar between them.
He did embody the heritage of the Dariège region with slightly sunken eye sockets, slightly curled black hair, and piercing blue eyes reminiscent of a cloudless sky over a towering mountain. His thin cheeks and thick stubble suggested a man in his thirties.
"Good afternoon, Mr. Valerio," Lugano greeted in Highlander.
Valerio, casting a glance at his armed bodyguards, responded with a smile in Intisian, flavored with a distinct Dariège accent.
"It's been a long time since I've returned home. It's a pleasure to see you."
"Indeed, Mr. Valerio," Lumian replied in Intisian, his voice also tinged with a Dariège accent.
While shepherds excelled at navigating the perils of the wilderness, an inherent wariness of authorities in settled human areas lingered.
Valerio nodded subtly and inquired, "Did you come from Larnaca?"
"Yes, I just finished attending the trade fair there," Lumian replied smoothly.
Having learned about Larnaca from the shepherds in Cordu, Lumian was well aware of the monthly trade fair that transformed the suburbs into a bustling marketplace. Shepherds from far and wide flocked to the event, seizing opportunities to trade lamb, wool, cheese, and other goods.
Valerio then delved into the topic of migration and Dariège's folklore. Lumian, well-versed in the subject from a shepherd's perspective, provided insightful answers.
In the midst of the conversation, he felt a bit disoriented. Recollections of his sister's occasional threats echoed in his mind: "If you don't study hard, I'll send you off to be a shepherd!"
Now, irony had it that he found himself playing the role of a shepherd.
After some time, Valerio nodded in satisfaction and took a puff of his cigar.
"You're quite wise. Grazing in the suburbs doesn't require identification, but settling in the city requires it. I'll get you two sets as soon as possible. In the future, if you encounter any difficulties, you can come to me. I might not be of much help, but

having one more person will give you more ideas. We're all from Dariège, so we naturally have to have each other's backs."
Lumian wasn't surprised by the black-market merchant's enthusiasm.
Uniting the people of one's homeland would create an exploitable force that couldn't be ignored!
It was reminiscent of the Savoie Mob. In the beginning, the pioneers, mostly Savoyards working as laborers and attendants, paved the way for the big bosses of the Savoie Chamber of Commerce. They expanded operations, safeguarded assets, and contributed immeasurably.
As for how many Savoyards might end up living a less than honest life or end up dead on the streets, the wealthy merchants turned a blind eye.
Lumian applied the acting techniques learned from Jenna and Anthony Reid's guidance to commend Valerio's noble character.
With a smile, Valerio offered a piece of advice.
"If you want to survive here, it's best to convert to Earth Mother as soon as possible. Find a good lady to marry and have a few children as soon as possible. Only then will you avoid hidden trouble."
Is urging marriage and childbearing a tradition in the Feynapotter Kingdom? Lumian criticized and smiled bitterly.
"Without copper coins, there won't be any good girls."
This Dariège proverb echoed in the room, signifying the difficulty for the poor, especially shepherds, to attract fine ladies and start families.
"This is Feynapotter, not Dariège," Valerio remarked, taking a sip of his white wine. "The good ladies here value robust bodies and bravery. The money can wait after you get married."
Perplexed, Lumian questioned, "Why?
"Men like that are more suited for reproduction, and they possess the ability to impregnate good ladies," Valerio explained with a smile. "This place is different from Dariège. The essence of many things lies in fertility and reproduction. Only by understanding this can you truly understand Feynapotter and praise the mother of all things!"
The black-market merchant rose, spreading his feet slightly and raising his hands high.
No wonder Feynapotter teems with people in the Northern Continent. Without their knack for land improvement and food cultivation, sustaining such a population would be impossible.
Lumian's thoughts raced as he probed,
"Mr. Valerio, I heard there's a sea prayer ritual next month. Any

chance to make some money?"
"Yes," Valerio replied, taking a seat. "Port Santa stays relatively warm in November. When my grandfather first came, he rented a wooden box to store popsicles, gathered a pile of ice from the factory, and covered them up. Then, he waded into the crowd, selling popsicles and ice cubes, earning his first bucket of gold. You can still do it now, but the competition is fiercer. You might even need to rent a bicycle for a larger thermal wooden box to hit more ritual venues."
"Many ritual venues?" Lumian asked.
Valerio replied with a smile, "This is a grand event for all of Port Santa. Different processes happen in various places. There's the Dance of the Sea at the port, a parade of flower boats across the city, a sea boat race, the vigil ritual in Milo Village, and the core sea sacrifice."
"What's the sea sacrifice?" Lumian inquired curiously.
Valerio slowly shook his head.
"I don't know the specifics. All I know is that the Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea board a special boat, head to a certain area beyond the port with sacrifices from fishermen and sea merchants, and perform a unique ritual. The detailed process is known only to those who've been there."
"The Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea?" Lumian kept picking keywords.
This perfectly aligned with the situation of a Darième shepherd who had just arrived in Port Santa.
Valerio smiled and said, "The crucial part of the Sea Prayer Ritual is selecting a man as the Governor of the Sea and four girls as the Maidens of the Sea. They'll lead a parade through the city on a flower boat before boarding a special fishing boat at the port. Sailing during the Dance of the Sea, they signal the start of the race. Later, they circle the port, entering the oldest local fishing village, Milo, for a night.
"At 7 a.m. the next morning, they reboard the boat and head to the sea sacrificial ground with the offerings."
The chosen Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea... A sea prayer ritual with multiple segments... Lumian repeated the key parts inwardly.
Suddenly, his heart skipped a beat as he made a connection.
This was very similar to the Lent celebration in the Darième mountains and the Spring Elf!
Though in reality, Lent celebration didn't involve Ava's head being chopped off or blood splattering, the dream scene left a deep impression on Lumian. He instinctively associated the Lent

celebration with something sinister and terrifying.
Doesn't the sea prayer ritual here resemble the Lent celebration?
Upon second thought, Lumian felt that the similarity didn't explain the issue.
This was a common process in mysticism—the creation of a specific symbol to represent the sacrificial target to achieve the desired effect.
This was evident in many folklore rituals.
"How are the Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea chosen?" Lumian asked curiously.
Could it be, like the Spring Elf, they're elected by all the residents of Port Santa?
Could one gain a high reputation and enjoy hidden benefits after the ritual?
Valerio took another drag from his cigar.
"They're chosen by the committee members of the Fisheries Guild, the oldest guild in Port Santa. They keep the specific criteria and whether they want to vote a secret. Even the official members of the Fisheries Guild don't know."
With that, the black-market merchant grinned.
"I also aim to become the Governor of the Sea. They say it comes with many perks, but no one spills the details."
"How have the previous Governors of the Sea fared?" Lumian was more concerned about this matter.
Valerio was taken aback. He thought for a moment before shaking his head.
"I'm not sure.
"Each Governor of the Sea serves only a one-year term. Once they step down, they seem to be relocated. Anyway, they can't stick around in Port Santa to avoid clashes with the new Governor. Heh heh, they're surely offered hefty compensation and allowed to bring their families."
Relocated? Were they truly relocated, or did they face something else? Lumian, drawing from past experiences, couldn't help but think of something ominous and dreadful in the face of such a ritualistic folklore.
Regarding the Governor of the Sea's subsequent experiences during the sea prayer ritual, it did sound peculiar.
Lumian thought for a moment and, adopting the tone befitting his current guise, inquired, "What about the Maidens of the Sea?"
"They're a hit among sea merchants, fishing company shareholders, and fishermen and sailors. Everyone wants to wed the Maidens of the Sea, a symbol of the sea's blessing. Explore various fishing villages, the Fisheries Guild, and the homes of sea

merchants, and you'll find many influential grandmothers who were once Maidens of the Sea." Valerio's face brimmed with envy, as if he too harbored dreams of marrying a Maiden of the Sea and becoming a true sea merchant.
This mirrors the hidden benefits of being a Spring Elf... Lumian suppressed the urge to raise his right hand and stroke his chin.
Knowing when to cease, he refrained from pressing further. After depositing 50 gold risot, he exited Valerio's illegal casino with Lugano.
Ludwig didn't come with them. Instead, he was stationed in a nearby family restaurant equipped with a children's entertainment facility, overseen by specialized caretakers and a provided meal.
In Feynapotter, numerous industries supported parents in raising children and alleviating stress. Intis and other countries lacked such facilities, and even if they existed, they were accessible only to the elite.
...
Trier, catacombs.
Franca and Jenna descended to the third level with their flickering white candles.
Feeling a bit less stifled, Franca turned her head and inquired, "What's the name of the tomb we're after?"
Jenna didn't hesitate and replied, "The Thorn and Shieldwall Tomb."

Chapter 540: Entrustee

Pa! Franca swiftly kicked away the hand bone attempting to block her path, deftly avoiding a trip.

"Aren't you tired of this? Can't you try something different?" she cursed, turning her head to inspect the road sign beside her.

It indicated they had finally reached their destination.

Each level of the catacombs sprawled vast, evident by the multitude of remains it accommodated. The road signs at each node could only display seven or eight iconic names and nearby tombs. Franca and Jenna relied on returning to the small sacrificial square and starting anew to locate the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb.

Unlike the fourth-level tomb, mostly sealed off and devoid of corpses and bones along the way, this place was strewn with scattered bones and decaying items, emitting a faint, uncomfortable stench.

Jenna glanced at the pile of bones outside and observed a few thin metal plates inlaid on the tomb wall. Their surfaces were blurry, showing signs of severe corrosion. Only the shieldwall and thorn symbol could be vaguely discerned. Whether there were other patterns remained impossible to tell.

"No wonder it's called the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb." Franca sighed.

Simultaneously, illuminated by the dim yellow candlelight, she noticed companion items arranged in a groove on the tomb's inner wall. Some were made of wood, weathered and decayed, while others were glass and porcelainware, in the form of fragments. The only intact item was a glass bottle, its surface inlaid with carved patterns resembling gold and adorned with a unique golden lid. Perhaps due to the metal's protection, the glass bottle didn't shatter, but it appeared murky and less transparent.

"It's exquisite, almost like art," Franca commented, puzzled. "Why didn't the catacomb workers take it away?"

It seemed quite valuable!

"Perhaps it was placed in this tomb after the catacombs were completed," Jenna speculated.

The two Demonesses didn't linger on the topic. Jenna retrieved one of the Mirror Substitutions and handed it to Franca.

With a swift leap, Franca vaulted over the seemingly silent but dangerous skeletons, gracefully landing at the entrance of the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb.

After confirming her surroundings and receiving no warnings from her spirituality, Jenna cautiously approached the groove on

the side wall along the ground, avoiding the pale-white bones.
Instinctively, she reached out with her right hand but withdrew it.
An old handkerchief from her pocket was produced, shielding her palm from direct contact with the antique tearcatcher.
The tears in the tearcatcher had long dried up.
Jenna scrutinized the tearcatcher for a moment before stowing it away. She retraced her steps and leaped to Franca's side.
"You completed the commission so easily?" she whispered uncertainly.
It was a stark contrast to the disappearance of the Deep Valley Cloister's gatekeeper she had previously accepted.
Franca scoffed and replied, "What kind of difficulty do you want for a 1,000 verl d'or commission?"
Jenna summarized her experience seriously, "That's true. The challenge lies in understanding the hidden dangers in the third level of the tomb."
...
Solow Motel.
As Lumian, reverting to Louis Berry, strode into the front hall, his gaze fell upon a vibrant scene. A young brown-haired girl, clad in a red dress adorned with black patterns, swayed gracefully in a corner. From time to time, she paused to refine her dance moves.
Lumian's thoughts raced as he approached the front desk. Seizing the opportunity, he inquired, "What's she doing?"
This time, he spoke in Intisian.
The grizzled boss, his cheekbones etched with sunburnt marks, appeared taken aback. Responding in Intisian with a Dariège accent, he explained, "She's my granddaughter, Isabella. She's practicing the Dance of the Sea for the performance next month."
"Dance of the Sea... Dance of the Sea for the sea prayer ritual?"
Lumian hadn't anticipated this revelation. Instinctively, he smiled and remarked, "That would make many girls jealous, wouldn't it?"
The boss grinned.
"This isn't like becoming a Maiden of the Sea. Not many people will be jealous, but participating in the Dance of the Sea performance can indeed make her proud and happy for a long time."
As Lumian signaled for Lugano to guide Ludwig back to their room, he casually inquired of the boss, "Did you come from Dariège?"
"That's right. I'm a Guillaume," the boss said with a self-deprecating smile. "Otta Guillaume. When I saw your identification this morning, I thought about greeting you in Intisian, but I gave up in the end. You know, Intisians aren't the best bunch. Even among my fellow villagers, I've come across a few with questionable morals."

"How long have you been in Port Santa?" Lumian asked with genuine interest, resting his right elbow on the front desk.
Otta Sr. pondered seriously.
"Forty years, I reckon. Probably forty years. Back then, I was an assistant in a caravan. I met my wife here and decided to stay. Heh heh, she's now a nagging old lady. Always fussing about how to dress when it gets cold or reminding me to head home for dinner, leaving the motel to the assistants. She manages everything so well that I don't have to worry. *How great is that?* It's rare to encounter such a woman in Darième."
Lumian endured Otta Sr.'s ramblings for a while before cutting to the chase.
"I've been invited by a friend to Port Santa to witness the sea prayer ritual."
"It's quite lively. The entire port will be in euphoria," Otta Sr. praised without hesitation.
Lumian cast a glance at Isabella, still engrossed in her practice, and casually remarked, "I heard there was an accident at last year's sea prayer ritual?"
"No?" Otta Sr. responded with a puzzled expression. "I watched the flower boat parade, the boat race, and the Dance of the Sea. There were no accidents."
Frowning, he fell into deep thought.
"However, Sandro did mention that the number of shipwrecks has increased significantly this year. We've encountered more pirates, and our fishing gains haven't been as good as last year's... Was there really an accident at last year's sea prayer ritual? Was it the vigil ritual or the sea sacrifice? Did the old fogeys at the Fisheries Guild conceal the problem?
"Who's Sandro?" Lumian pressed.
Otta Sr. smiled again.
"It's my child, Isabella's father. He works as a clerk in the government, and his wife is a teacher at the grammar school."
Is Port Santa's sea prayer ritual genuinely effective? Has its protective power diminished after the April Fool's prank? Lumian's mind flashed with the information he'd gathered earlier.
Of the three peripheral April Fool's members involved in the prank, one journeyed to Torres, Gaia Province's capital, to customize a unique golden ring. Another handled the bribery of the Fisheries Guild, sending the lamb along with the golden ring as an offering to the specially prepared ship for the sea sacrifice. The third, disguised as a reporter, shadowed the Fisheries Guild committee members, observing and documenting their reactions.
The elderly's mix of shock, terror, and anger upon receiving the

news was a source of long-lasting delight for the April Fool's participants.
After seeking more details about the sea prayer ritual, Lumian bid farewell to Ol' Otta and ascended to his suite upstairs.
...
At 4 p.m. in Trier, Quartier de l'Observatoire, near Place du Purgatoire.
After donning a hooded black robe and transforming her face into the dramatic persona of Showy Diva, Jenna followed the feedback from her contact and reached a street that specialized in funeral items.
Most Trieriens passing by appeared fairly ordinary, but a handful sported white masks, brandished blunt scythes, and adorned themselves in black robes. They posed as undead messengers from folklore, sewing white skulls and other artistic elements onto their shoulders...
Thanks to their presence and the unique atmosphere of Trier, Jenna, dressed as a warlock with a hood concealing her features, blended seamlessly into the surroundings.
She paused in a quiet corner and retrieved the exquisite tearcatcher.
Before long, someone resembling her approached and, in a gravelly voice, inquired, "How much for this tearcatcher?"
"1,000 verl d'or," Jenna responded, her excitement bubbling.
This marked her first successfully executed commission.
"1,001 verl d'or," countered the warlock-dressed man.
Upon the secret signal matching, Jenna insisted on charging only 1,000 verl d'or.
Once the confirmation was mutual, she handed over the tearcatcher, received the reward, and discreetly departed.
With the tearcatcher in hand, the hooded figure navigated the nearby streets, taking nearly fifteen minutes to circle back to Place du Purgatoire and approach a street bench at the edge.
A man sat there, engrossed in a newspaper.
The hooded figure presented the exquisite tearcatcher, adorned with intricate hollowed-out golden patterns, and whispered, "I've completed your commission. Will it offset the money I owe you?"
The person on the bench lowered the newspaper, looked up, revealing a clerk with curly black hair, sunken eyes, and thick lips. A crystal-like monocle adorned his right eye.
"Monsieur Monette?" the hooded figure pressed in confirmation.
Monette accepted the tearcatcher, gently tracing the golden patterns with a slow smile playing on his lips.
...

Solow Motel, fifth-floor suite.
Lumian spent the entire afternoon within the confines of his room at the Solow Motel. Lounging on a recliner, he swayed gently, engrossed in his ongoing study of Highlander. Now and then, he leafed through travel books detailing the customs of the Feynapotter Kingdom.
As evening approached, Lugano, who had ventured downstairs for a chat, returned to Lumian's room.
Leaning in, Lugano lowered his voice and shared, "Boss, there's a Madame looking for you."
Madame... Lumian felt a chill run down his spine upon hearing that term, and the muscles in his back tensed.
Which "Madame" could this be?
After a brief pause, Lumian realized that Lugano was referring to an ordinary Madame, not the "Madame" of the Beyonder world.
"Which Madame, and what brings her here?" Lumian inquired calmly, sitting up and addressing his translator.
Lugano shook his head and replied, "She didn't say. Just mentioned having something to entrust to the renowned adventurer, Louis Berry."
Lugano emphasized the term "renowned adventurer."

Chapter 541: Simple Entrustment

How did my reputation spread so quickly? Even if the rumor of me hunting Burman arrived in Port Santa two days before the Flying Bird, the entrustee would have to take time to determine where I live, the authenticity of the news... Lumian estimated a few days before someone sought his services, and this led his thoughts to the unnatural 'Madame.'

He stood up and said to Lugano, "Invite that Madame in."

With those words, Lumian stooped to pick up the distinctive golden straw hat from the small round table. He aimed to make Louis Berry's image more memorable, adding a touch of flair to his persona.

In no time, Lugano escorted a woman in her thirties into the room.

She wore a loose-fitting white dress adorned with red flowers, accentuating her curves.

Port Santa's women, in contrast to the Dariège region just across the mountain, favored glamorous and stylish attire, embodying a romantic and liberated aesthetic—reflecting the traditional taste of the Feynapotter Kingdom.

The lady, with long brown hair tied up and a healthy complexion, entered without a maid. Her azure eyes, framed by thick eyelashes, focused on Lumian, who held the golden straw hat.

Her red lips moved, and though Lumian couldn't grasp every word, the name "Louis Berry" was discernible in her pronunciation.

Promptly, Lugano initiated the translation.

"The Madame says, Honorable Monsieur Louis Berry, I've heard about your hunt of the Demon Warlock. I wonder if you're willing to help my family solve a problem."

Lumian's gaze shifted from the jeweled bead bracelet on the lady's wrist to her beautiful and mature face.

"What's your name?"

"Giorgia," the lady replied after Lugano translated.

Lumian repeated, acknowledging the lady's name with a smile,

"Madame Giorgia, what would you like to entrust me with?"

Giorgia listened attentively to Lugano's translation and spoke in Highlander with a slight local accent, "An evil creature has appeared in my household. I need your help eliminating it."

Lumian, though grasping the gist, awaited Lugano's translation by casting his gaze at him.

When Lugano conveyed Giorgia's words in Intisian, Lumian chuckled and said, "I'm sorry, I forgot to invite the beautiful Madame to have a seat.

"The great adventurer Gehrman Sparrow taught us that manners are very important."
Gesturing toward the sofa, Lumian settled onto the divan, attempting to caress Ludwig's head, like a godfather.
Ludwig quickly shifted his position, avoiding Lumian's attempt to treat him as a child.
As Giorgia took her place in an armchair, Lumian, shaking his golden straw hat, leaned forward.
"Since it's an evil creature, why don't you just find a clergyman of the Earth Mother Church to handle it?"
Giorgia looked at Lugano and listened attentively.
She pursed her thick lips and replied in Highlander,
"We don't want the Church to know about this. It will damage our family's reputation."
Is that why you are entrusting me, a foreigner who will leave after watching the sea prayer ritual? And that's after confirming my ability to deal with that evil creature... Lumian, pondering this choice, shifted his gaze away from Lugano. After a brief pause, he inquired, "Tell me more about that evil creature."
After a brief pause, Giorgia contemplated and then shared, "It resembles a tailless lizard. It attacked everyone in the household, killing a few maids and valets and devoured their bodies.
"Our family's bodyguards fired on it and injured it, but they failed to kill it because it has very strong scales. We could only chase it to the basement and lock it up.
"We thought it would slowly starve to death from hunger and thirst. To our surprise, nearly two weeks later, it's still alive and trying to break open the basement door."
It doesn't seem very dangerous. They could repel it with ordinary firearms... They didn't mention why the lizard appeared. It appears that this is why they aren't willing to seek out the Church of Earth Mother and the local government to handle it... Lumian thoughtfully compared the few words he understood to the content translated by Lugano and confirmed that the guide hadn't embellished or redacted any content.
Lumian then casually inquired, "Were there any casualties among the bodyguards?"
Giorgia, after the translation, shook her head slowly.
"No fatalities. Two were injured, but nothing severe. Yes, that monster made the entire room feel like it had been dragged into the deep sea, affecting normal movements."
As if dragged into the deep sea... There's indeed certain Beyonder phenomena, but it seems relatively weak... Deep sea... Lumian's interest was piqued as he earnestly inquired about the details.

After a series of responses, Giorgia said gently, "Monsieur Louis Berry, we're willing to pay you 15,000 risot, but you have to promise not to publicize this matter."
15,000 gold risot? According to your description, the monster is worth at most 5,000 gold risot. The remaining 10,000 should be a hush money, right? Lumian smiled and said in broken Highlander, "Sure thing."
Rising from his seat, Lumian announced in Intisian, "I want to observe the situation at the scene."
Giorgia stood up and listened to Lugano's translation.
She wasn't surprised by Louis Berry's request. Familiar with adventurers and bounty hunters, she understood the importance of assessing the situation firsthand and making thorough preparations. It meant survivability or success for the elites.
"Now?" Giorgia sought confirmation.
Lumian comprehended the word and affirmed in Highlander, "Now."
Adorning his golden straw hat, he made his way to the door, supplementing in Intisian, "Also, prepare a sumptuous dinner for me, my godson, and my translator."
Giorgia, slightly taken aback by the translation, watched Lumian's departure. She couldn't shake the feeling that this adventurer possessed a distinct quality compared to those she had encountered before.
...
Port Santa, Saint Lana Street.
To the northeast of the city stood multi-story villas adorned with gardens, lawns, and stables.
Giorgia's residence occupied number 21 on this street. The five-story villa boasted brownish-red outer walls, adorned with statues of Angels and Saintesses from the Earth Mother Church, along with symbols depicting waves and fishing.
Wearing his distinctive golden straw hat and holding Ludwig's hand, the latter carrying a red school bag, Lumian trailed behind Giorgia, accompanied by her maid and valet. Together, they entered the villa's hall, which also served as a spacious dance floor beneath a tall, dome ceiling.
As Lumian stepped inside, he felt unseen eyes upon him from the circular railings on the upper floors.
It's indeed a household with multiple families sharing one roof. There are quite a few people... Lumian mused, choosing not to look up, smiling inwardly.
The concealed observers remained hidden. Giorgia then summoned two legally armed bodyguards, leading Lumian and

the entourage down to the second basement where the iron-black door stood tightly shut.
As if sensing someone approaching, the door slammed as if struck by a powerful force.
"It's inside," Giorgia stated, pointing at the iron door with a complicated expression.
Lumian, understanding without the need for translation, pressed down on his golden straw hat and directed, "Take my godson to the living room for pre-
dinner dessert."
As he spoke, he strode towards the subterranean iron door without a backward glance.
Upon hearing Lugano's translation, Giorgia and the maid hastily guided Ludwig back to the surface. A bodyguard caught up to Lumian, his expression serious, and handed him a pewter-black key.
Without delay, the two bodyguards drew their revolvers, positioning themselves to aim at the iron door, preventing the monster from escaping.
Lumian methodically inserted the key into the lock, unlocking it.
He tossed the key aside and effortlessly pushed the iron door open with one hand.
In an instant, the monster's figure came into view.
A humanoid lizard, adorned with glistening, robust scales, met Lumian's eyes. Where there were no scales, smooth, sinister snake-like skin was exposed.
The monster's eyes were vertical, and they glowed with a nearly transparent light. Its mouth harbored sharp teeth that formed a menacing vortex.
Simultaneously, Lumian felt the air around him grow dense, like shackles enveloping him, clearly impeding his normal movements.
The moisture gave the sensation of plunging into the deep sea, enduring pressure from all directions.
The humanoid lizard lunged forward, and Lumian's body leaned towards the enemy as if pulled by a vortex.
Yet, the obvious smile on his lips persisted as he calmly attempted to pivot.
Suddenly, a latent power surged within him, allowing him to break free from the air's constraints.
Lumian swiftly rotated his body, swinging his right fist from below.
Instantly, crimson flames, nearly white, ignited from his fist, spreading to his forearm, resembling a dazzling fire serpent.

Bang!
The punch struck the humanoid lizard's chest and abdomen, causing the flames to compress.
Boom!
The humanoid lizard was sent flying, crystalline scales splattering from its chest and abdomen, resulting in a massive wound.
Lumian didn't give chase. With one hand in his pocket, he changed his right fist to a palm and gently pushed forward.
Crimson, nearly white fireballs materialized before him, whistling into the wound on the lizard's chest and abdomen.
Rumble!
The monster disintegrated, its flesh and blood splattering across the ground.
Lumian observed for a few moments before adjusting his golden straw hat. He turned around and walked towards the stairs leading to the surface.
The two armed and vigilant bodyguards maintained their original posture, still in a daze, unable to comprehend what had transpired.
Lumian didn't "rouse" them as he ascended the stairs.
Upon hearing the explosion, Giorgia, on the ground, left the lounge with Lugano and approached the staircase. She saw Lumian coming up.
"Have you confirmed the situation?" Madame Giorgia asked with concern.
Lumian replied with a smirk, "It's resolved."

Chapter 542: Abnormal Situation

It's resolved? It's already resolved? Giorgia suspected that the translator had made a mistake. Instinctively, she asked, "Is there a quick solution, or has it already been resolved?"

Lugano cast a sympathetic glance at the beautiful madame, experiencing the same emotions he felt when reading about how his employer had slain the Demon Warlock.

How could a monster confined to the basement by ordinary armed bodyguards compare to Burman, who had a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or?

Despite finding it unnecessary, Lugano respectfully conveyed Giorgia's words to Lumian.

Lumian removed the golden straw hat from his head and said, "You may instruct the servants to clean the basement."

Upon hearing Lugano's translation, Giorgia's pupils dilated as she looked at Lumian in bewilderment, unsure of what to say.

At that moment, a bodyguard guarding the basement ran up. Upon seeing Giorgia, he immediately leaned over, lowered his voice, and whispered something to her.

Giorgia's expression shifted a few times before she smiled and said to Lumian, "As expected of the renowned adventurer. I previously suspected that your hunt for the Demon Warlock was merely a rumor. Now, I completely believe it. Your might is enough to resound throughout the Five Seas."

She paused for a moment and said apologetically, "I'm sorry; we haven't had time to prepare dinner. We might need you to wait in the lounge for a while."

"Better to have me wait than a beautiful lady," Lumian replied with a smile.

That's basic courtesy!

He followed Giorgia's maid into the lounge specially catered for Ludwig to enjoy the pre-dinner dessert.

Giorgia and her bodyguard descended into the basement.

A sense of relief washed over her as she surveyed the blood-stained room, finding no trace of the humanoid lizard; it had completely vanished.

Dinner unfolded in a private chamber, exclusive to Lumian, his companions, and Giorgia. The lady's maid attended to them, serving dishes and pouring wine.

Lumian, intrigued by his surroundings, noted how the expansive mansion accommodated the needs of its diverse occupants. Small private rooms outside the grand banquet hall ensured the privacy of gatherings.

The meal was a delight for everyone. Lumian received 15,000 risot in banknotes; Giorgia appeared visibly at ease; Ludwig appreciated the villa's chefs; and Lugano experienced a high-end banquet for the first time.
The great adventurer, usually one to boast and joke while not in his monster-
hunting cold persona, lightened the atmosphere at the dining table.
This pleasant ambiance continued until Lumian departed from 21 Saint Lana Street alongside Ludwig and Lugano.
Lugano, slightly flushed from the white wine, gazed back at the brightly lit building and sighed deeply.
"I wonder when I'll have a house this grand, with numerous servants and chefs, and a wife like Giorgia."
Lumian teased, "Your emphasis is on the last part, isn't it?"
Lugano chuckled sheepishly and replied, "Well, based on your description, I might as well have been capable of taking down that humanoid lizard too."
It meant he possessed the skills to tackle a mission worth 30,000 verl d'or!
With a few more successful missions, Lugano's dream could become a reality!
"With guns and special bullets prepared in advance, coupled with ample combat experience, a Planter is indeed capable," Lumian carefully assessed his guide.
He avoided using "Doctor" to refer to Lugano, as this Sequence primarily bestowed healing superpowers and didn't offer significant improvement in combat.
Lugano was delighted to hear this, sensing a newfound hope in his life.
Lumian glanced at him and added with a smile, "However, if you were to accept this commission, the reward might only be two to three thousand risot.
"The rest accounts for the premium based on the great adventurer's reputation and the hush money for such a renowned figure.
"That's why you need to hunt down Demon Warlock before you can accept such a lucrative mission."
The smile on Lugano's face gradually faded.
If I could hunt down Demon Warlock, my dream would be fulfilled. I wouldn't have to be an adventurer!
Lumian paid no mind to the translator's emotional shifts. He glanced back at the large five-story villa and said thoughtfully, "The Matriarch of this family didn't appear even until the end..."

While it was understandable that the other family members hadn't shown themselves, logically speaking, as the head of the family, the Matriarch should have at least expressed her gratitude to the adventurer who had helped them resolve the problem.
"That's correct. A woman of Giorgia's age shouldn't be the head of such a large family," Lugano acknowledged, sensing the anomaly.
He refrained from bringing up the potential absence of a Matriarch in the villa. In extended families like this, there were likely more than one older woman who had given birth. If one Matriarch passed away, another would soon assume the role. Additionally, the Earth Mother Church was renowned for its adept treatment of illnesses in the Northern and Southern Continents. The Feynapotter Kingdom's average lifespan surpassed that of Loen, Intis, Feysac, and other nations. Plenty of individuals lived beyond the age of 70, especially with Giorgia's family's wealth providing ample medical resources.
Lumian averted his gaze and took a few steps.
"Go to the bar tonight and inquire about Giorgia's family."
As he spoke, he counted out 1,000 risot for Lugano.
"This covers your expenses for your activities during this period, including Ludwig's meal expenses when I'm out."
"Yes, Boss." Lugano appreciated his employer's generosity the most.
Near midnight, the Doctor returned to the suite at Solow Motel, reeking of alcohol. He addressed Lumian, who was observing Ludwig eat supper, "I got the info. Giorgia is the wife of Rubió Paco, a shareholder of Port Santa's Fisheries Company and a committee member of the Fisheries Guild. The Paco family's Matriarch is Rubio's mother, Martha."
Committee member of the Fisheries Guild... Lumian instantly focused.
This was a person knowledgeable about the complete process of the sea prayer ritual and the accident from last year.
"What else did you find out?" Lumian asked casually.
Lugano rambled on for a while before adding, "By the way, Martha was once a Maiden of the Sea."
Maiden of the Sea... Lumian pondered for a few seconds. She had been sought after by a specific crowd before marrying into the Paco family? He asked, "Did you find out anything about Martha's recent situation?"
"No." Lugano shook his head.
Lumian leaned back in his chair, as if preparing to doze off, not pressing for more information.
The next day, he stayed at the Solow Motel, awaiting Valerio's preparations for his local identification documents.

As evening approached, his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, emerged from the void and handed him a letter.
Lumian glanced at the charred corpse, still engulfed in viscous black flames, and casually asked, "Who sent it?"
Only five people were aware of his messenger's summoning incantation.
"A woman very close to death and darkness," Baynfel replied.
Lumian unfolded the letter and read the familiar handwriting: "There's a gathering scheduled for 10 tonight..."
This was from Hela. Before leaving Trier, Lumian had specifically summoned Hela's messenger and informed her of his messenger's summoning method. With his frequent travel and changes in residence, it was impractical to summon Hela's messenger each time he stayed in a motel. Hence, he made such arrangements to convenience her in getting him.
Each messenger was intricately bound to its master. Through the mystical connection of the contract, the messenger could track the contracted target regardless of their changing locations.
The Research Society has another gathering... Lumian dismissed Baynfel and moved to the window of the master bedroom.
He peered into the distance, toward the mottled mountain range to the northeast.
Under the afterglow of the setting sun, the mountains seemed to doze in the burning sky.
Lumian silently observed for a moment, then retrieved the silver Lie earring and placed it on his left earlobe.
In an instant, his hair transformed, turning golden and elongating downward.
...
At 10 p.m., in the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian, cloaked in a black robe, hood, and a silver-white half-
mask with a "Muggle" label, materialized.
He immediately spotted Franca, who wore an Assassin suit and had pulled down her hood.
Franca, no longer concealing their amicable relationship, leaned in and lowered her voice.
"Port Santa didn't have a Derangement outbreak, I suppose?"
"I'm not the embodiment of calamity," Lumian replied.
He then said to Franca, "Help me inquire in different teams later if there are any potions, charms, or items that can allow me to master a language in a short period of time—not true mastery, but the kind that allows mastery for a short period."
Franca asked in confusion, "Don't you have a translator?"

Lumian smiled and said, "It's just that I suddenly had an idea. When everyone thinks I don't know Highlander, I can understand what they're talking about. Perhaps it can bring about unexpected gains."
Your scheming heart is truly stained! After Franca playfully cursed him, she wanted to praise Aurore's beautiful lips and smile, one that ought to be seen more often, but her rationality made her give up on the idea to avoid triggering Lumian.
She glanced at a corner of the palace and said, "The team most likely to obtain such items is actually the Academy. However, it's inconvenient for you to ask. It can easily arouse suspicion. Coincidentally, I'm heading to the Academy team today to inquire if anyone knows who the owners of the ancient tombs in Trier's catacombs are. Heh heh, many of them are considered semi-historians. If no one knows, I'll get 007 to delve into the Church's confidential information."
"Why do you ask?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.
Franca recounted how she and Jenna had obtained a new Mirror World Fragment in the catacombs.
Lumian listened attentively and scoffed.
"Aren't you guys too bold? Jenna has been inspired by your courage!"
As soon as he finished speaking, he saw 007 approaching menacingly.

Chapter 543: Same Dream

Wearing a lion headgear, 007 intercepted Franca's path, gritting his teeth.
"Hidden Blade, thanks to your intel, I might be deployed on a mission right now."
"Huh?" Franca didn't quite get it.
Deployed on a mission? If you're out, who do I report problems to in Trier?
007 glanced at Muggle, standing silently beside them, and took a deep breath.
"I might head to Feynapotter as an assistant to retrieve that Sealed Artifact.
"It's Intis' loss, and it wouldn't be good for it to end up in the hands of the Feynapotter Kingdom."
"Will the Feynapotterians allow you to enforce the law in their country? Isn't transnational cooperation troublesome?" Franca roughly understood 007's concerns.
007 pondered for a moment and said, "We're still working through the process, but the Feynapotterians aren't too opposed this time. They want to eliminate the hidden dangers of the Sealed Artifact ASAP. They have precautions to take and can't spare many to surround and intercept it, so they might as well borrow our strength."
The Church of Earth Mother and the Feynapotter Kingdom need to be vigilant. Are they short on manpower? This is a problem with a single Church country. They don't have the resources like a combination of two or three Churches. Wait, that doesn't make sense. The Feynapotter Kingdom has a royal family, and Beyonders of the Church don't only follow the pathway of their deity. Lumian sensed something amiss from 007's words.
This made him feel that the hidden dangers in the Feynapotter Kingdom were no less than those in countries with multiple deities and Churches.
"Is that so..." Franca suddenly had an idea. "I have a way to ensure you don't have to be deployed!"
"What way?" 007 asked skeptically.
Franca smiled and said, "If you're on an important mission in Trier, there's no need for you to be deployed."
"Important mission..." 007 repeated in a low voice, suddenly having an ominous feeling.
Franca seized the opportunity and said, "We've located another Mirror World Fragment in an ancient tomb on the fourth level of the catacombs."

"Now, we have a lead to pursue the Mirror People in Trier. If you report it and convey that you're conducting an investigation, you likely won't end up in Feynapotter."
007 stared at Franca, dressed in an assassin suit, for a moment. He raised his hand to rub his forehead and spoke gravely, "Thanks a lot, Hidden Blade!"
Franca pretended not to catch 007's underlying message and continued, "The tomb is situated near the Crazy Mushroom Cave. Its door is wide open, and there are no conspicuous signs. Please gather information from the catacombs about its construction date, its occupants, and the ancient family it belongs to. Only then can we determine why the peculiar Mirror People entered and met their demise there."
007 took a deep breath and slowly exhaled.
"You're a perfect boss for me."
All you know is to assign me missions!
Franca let out a hollow laugh and shifted the topic.
"Do you have any idea what's happening in the Crazy Mushroom Cave? Mushrooms are somehow thriving in that silent, dark, and tightly sealed place. Moreover, it seems to be the only location in the fourth-level catacombs where mushrooms grow."
007 nodded gently and replied, "I have some knowledge about that. Once upon a time, I was quite intrigued by the mushroom cave. I conducted an investigation and discovered that it was initially quite ordinary—a naturally formed cave among the ancient tombs. When the catacombs were completed, some of the ancient corpses were relocated there. Within a few weeks, it became overrun with mushrooms and sealed off."
The Beyonder powers brought about by the seal's formal formation combined with the problem of certain ancient corpses created such a Crazy Mushroom Cave? Lumian analyzed the reason thoughtfully.
Observing Muggle's attentive silence, 007 nodded courteously and turned to head towards the Sanctuary team.
Franca couldn't help but chuckle.
"He's so polite to you. If only he knew that most of his troubles and fatigue stemmed from you, his expression would be quite the sight."
Lumian chuckled in response.
"But the Mirror People situation has nothing to do with me."
As they conversed, they strolled toward the corner where the Academy team congregated.
Midway, Lumian suddenly turned to Franca.
"Do you think any member of the Research Society, especially those

in Trier, might have been replaced by the Mirror People?"
"That's impossible... Don't scare me!" Franca sounded alarmed.
Lumian fought the urge to pout, not wanting to destroy his sister's beautiful image.
"What's impossible? Any Trier citizen could be replaced by the Mirror People, even if they're part of a secret organization.
"Moreover, most in the Research Society are Beyonders with a strong spirit of exploration. Their encounters with Beyonder incidents are more frequent than regular folks."
Franca nodded seriously, acknowledging the potential risk couldn't be disregarded.
"As a Review Committee member, you should liaise with Madame Hela and the others, observe discreetly," Lumian reminded her.
There lingered uncertainty about whether the Mirror People of transmigrators retained their pre-transmigration memories. If they did, they could bypass the Committee's safeguards easily. Their interactions within the Research Society could go undetected unless they caused harm, staying concealed.
"Understood," Franca responded with solemnity.
At that moment, many familiar members of Lumian's team gathered in the corner, including Professor, Associate Professor, Headmaster, Periodic Table, Bear, Griffin, and Isotope.
Some wore different disguises than before, though Lumian had grown accustomed to their diverse outfits. They were individuals who wouldn't attend a masquerade ball in the same attire twice. Regardless, their general body shape, language, and chest labels helped others accurately identify them.
After exchanging greetings, Lumian and Franca each took a seat.
After a few minutes, Franca raised her hand and said, "Is anyone selling Language Comprehension-type items? I know someone who's going overseas and wants to acquire some."
Upon hearing her request, some chuckled, while others pursed their lips. The former wanted to inquire if her friend was herself, while the latter recalled the key member of April Fool's who had caused numerous catastrophes in the Research Society.
Bear, encased in a brown bear hide, spoke in ancient Feysac in a muffled voice, "I have a Language Comprehension charm that achieves a similar effect."
"Language Comprehension charm?" Franca asked with interest.
Having been fluent in ancient Feysac for many years, she had become relatively proficient in Loen, Highlander, and other languages of the Northern Continent. However, she lacked knowledge of the Southern Continent's languages.
The Academy team member with the code name "Bear" glanced at

Hidden Blade with his coffee-colored eyes.
"Yes, its essence is to temporarily strengthen and alter the Body of Heart and Mind, improving understanding, reasoning, and communication. It also imparts a portion of the corresponding language's knowledge. Using one lasts seven days.
"Currently, Language Comprehension charms are divided into three types. The lowest level is for all ancient Feysacian languages. Creating them is the least difficult. You only need..."
Bear paused, making a conversion based on the current exchange rate.
"A thousand verl d'or.
"The middle level covers all ordinary languages. It costs 2,000 verl d'or. At the highest level, you can temporarily master a designated supernatural language. 5,000 verl d'or. Hidden Blade, which one do you want?"
Franca listened attentively, sensing a subtle expression of pity and regret in Bear's gaze.
Is he pitying me for daring to drink the Witch potion back then? Franca wondered silently. Without looking at Muggle, she made the decision.
"Three lowest-level Language Comprehension charms, one mid-level. Uh, can I get a discount?"
She believed Lumian would eventually track down Hisoka in the Southern Continent. It was better to prepare a Mid-level Language Comprehension charm now.
"No." Bear shook his head.
"Alright," Franca said, lacking talent for bargaining. She habitually asked for a discount to avoid potential future regret.
After Franca paid and settled on the delivery method, Professor, adorned with a black butterfly mask, surveyed the area. After a moment of contemplation, she spoke up.
"Associate Professor, I and a few Warlocks I know have been having strange dreams lately. In these dreams, there's a wilderness with many indistinct figures wandering around."
"Have any of you had one too?"
She directed her inquiry towards the other Warlocks in the Academy team.
Wilderness... Wandering figures... *Could this be related to some Madame's Paramita?* Lumian, concealed behind a silver-white half-mask, furrowed his brow slightly. It seemed unlikely that a Warlock would dream of Paramita. *Why would they?*
Observing other Warlocks expressing that they had similar dreams, but the frequency and clarity decreased over time, Lumian, acting as Aurore, nodded and posed a question instead of

providing an answer.
"When did you guys start having this dream?"
Could it be an abnormality caused by the Hidden Sage?
Professor had clearly made confirmation on this matter.
"The two of us and some friends started after the night of the terrifying storm in Trier—last month."
She knew that Muggle was also in Trier and knew the exact night she referred to.
The sudden, terrifying downpour occurred the night the Hostel ritual was activated... Could it be influenced by the leaked power of the seal? Is there a high-level power of the Mystery Pryer pathway sealed inside? Or were the fallen monks of the Deep Valley Cloister connected to the Hidden Sage? Did this evil god secretly do something that left some power in the real world? Lumian pondered and then said, "I heard something happened to Trier's Deep Valley Cloister that night, and the Savant pathway and the Mystery Pryer pathway are neighboring pathways."
Professor, Associate Professor, and the others turned their gaze to Muggle. They hadn't expected their companion, who had recently moved to Trier, to possess such secretive knowledge about the local area.
Lumian continued slowly, "Shouldn't we inquire with people from the Savant pathway and see if they had similar dreams?"
Good idea! Franca silently praised.

Chapter 544: Threat

Professor agreed with Lumian's suggestion, believing it could help verify certain things. Both Professor and Associate Professor went to another team and found Stonemason, who was known for crafting mystical items.

Dressed in a doctor's white coat with a saucepan over his head, Stonemason's azure eyes focused on the Academy Warlocks through two specially dug holes.

He nodded and said, "Recently, I've also been having strange dreams related to a wilderness. However, in addition to the endless wilderness and wandering figures, there are also some peculiar scenes in my dreams."

As expected, it affects the neighboring pathways of Mystery Pryer and Savant... Lumian nodded slightly as Professor pressed further, "What scenes are they?"

Stonemason's voice echoed within the saucepan.

"I see scenes of primitive humans independently creating fire for the first time. Ancient humans making sacrifices to the sky and land. There were many similar scenes, but they were very vague. I was in a dream and couldn't scrutinize them carefully. I can't remember the exact situations clearly.

"According to the Savant pathway's Beyonders, this is a fragment of civilization."

Upon hearing Stonemason's response, Lumian's forehead twitched imperceptibly.

It reminded him of the moment he heard a peculiar sound accompanying scenes while wearing the Mystery Prying Eye in Fourth Epoch Trier!

As the scenes unfolded, a chorus of voices echoed one name: Celestial Master!

Was what I received a fragment of a civilization? The Eye of Truth correspond to the Mystery Pryer pathway. Upon their use, they activated the powers of neighboring pathways, revealing corresponding sounds? But there is a prerequisite, a special environment... Fourth Epoch Trier holds remnants of advanced powers from the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways. Celestial Master—the term is similar to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings which influences Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways. Meanwhile, Celestial Master correlates with the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways. Lumian fell into deep thought after his initial shock.

Franca glanced at him, perplexed by his limited participation in the discussion.

After a moment, Lumian snapped out of his daze. Considering Professor, Stonemason, and others' speculations, he carefully stated, "The sudden downpour in Trier is an outward manifestation of a catastrophe, much like the Deep Valley Cloister.
"I suspect that a high-level power leaked during the catastrophe, affecting Beyonders from two neighboring pathways. The impact is more pronounced for those in Trier but relatively minor for those outside."
At this point, Lumian smirked.
"I've observed that Warlocks outside Trier experienced significant decreases in the frequency and clarity of their wilderness dreams. Strangely, none of the Warlocks in Trier mentioned this."
Bear in a brown bear skin suit nodded approvingly.
Professor and others concurred with Lumian's hypothesis, relieved that the situation was indeed improving.
They couldn't help but marvel at Muggle's remarkable growth after surviving the April Fool's trap.
Franca then inquired about the owner of the ancient tomb beside the Crazy Mushroom Cave in Trier's catacombs.
No one knew the answer. The Warlocks in Trier offered to assist in the investigation, but there were no guarantees of finding anything.
Franca had already entrusted this matter to 007. Her current focus was on uncovering any Mirror People who might have infiltrated the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, thanks to Lumian's teachings.
After agreeing on the reward, she left the Academy team and headed towards Hela.
After discussing the Mirror People situation with Hela, Lumian emerged from the corner where the Academy team was located, ready to gather mysticism knowledge from the death domain with the Purgatory team.
Franca immediately approached Lumian, lowered her voice, and asked with a smile, "What were you thinking when Stonemason recounted his dream? It seemed like you had thought of something important."
Hadn't I shared what I saw and heard after using the Eye of Truth underground? That shouldn't be the case. I won't forget sharing matters involving the Celestial Master with Franca... Lumian's heart suddenly stirred, feeling that his spirituality was hindering this matter.
After a moment of contemplation, he responded, "It's rather complicated and involves high-level powers. I'll write to Madam Magician later and see if I can share it with you."

"Alright," Franca said eagerly. "Don't forget!"
Her curiosity was piqued.
At that moment, Hela, still dressed as a black widow, approached Lumian and asked, "Any progress in tracking Ultraman and Bard?"
"Not at the moment. I'm still compiling the necessary information," Lumian replied truthfully.
Hela nodded slightly and replied, "If you need assistance, don't hesitate to reach out to me or Gandalf."
The primary objective for most members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society was to eliminate the April Fool's traitors.
"Got it." Lumian had no plans to confront the key members of April Fool's on his own.
Undoubtedly, it was optimal for him to carry out the final execution.
...
Upon returning to the real world, Lumian noticed that night was falling. He set out a stack of late-night snacks for Ludwig and summoned Madam Magician's messenger. After freshening up—washing his face, brushing his teeth, and snuffing out the wall lamp—he settled into bed.
Just then, a sense of alertness surged through him. He sat up suddenly, focusing on a specific spot in the room.
Outside the window, a faint crimson glow shimmered. In one corner, a shadow swiftly expanded, reaching up to the ceiling, forming a silhouette resembling two goat horns.
It was as if a devil had emerged from the dark abyss.
Lumian's eyebrows twitched as he stared at the colossal black shadow.
The devil-like shadow resonated with a deep and imposing voice.
"Lowly human, you must answer my question truthfully."
It spoke in Intisian.
Lumian cracked his neck gently and asked, "What's the question?"
The devilish figure rumbled in a deep tone, "What did the Paco family's Giorgia hire you to do?"
Lumian chuckled.
"What do human affairs have to do with a devil like you? I'm a professional adventurer. I won't betray my employer."
The devilish shadow growled, "Then I'll use your blood as the answer!"
Before it completed its sentence, its aura surged, and the crimson moonlight in the room instantly succumbed to darkness, shrouding the space in a chilling aura.
The corners of Lumian's mouth curled up. With a swift press of his left hand, he catapulted from the bed like a cheetah, propelling

himself towards the ceiling.
Overhead, darkness enveloped him, resembling an abyssal reflection.
In a sudden twist, Lumian's body turned pitch black, almost zero in thickness.
He morphed into a shadow creature and seamlessly melded into the darkness!
Within the dimly illuminated fishnet of shadows, Lumian spotted the "devil."
Standing just over a meter tall, the creature was child-sized, yet its skin was creased like that of an elderly man in his seventies or eighties.
Its disproportionately large head featured protruding eyes, presenting a grotesque visage that was beyond Lumian's knowledge of creatures.
In the form of a shadow, Lumian "swam" toward it, aiming to ensnare the peculiar creature that manifested the devil's projection. He planned on pulling it out of the darkness and controlling it with the Spell of Harrumph.
Many of Lumian's abilities were constrained in the shadow creature form.
The short, malevolent creature with wrinkled skin appeared defenseless against the shadow's entanglement, surprising Lumian, who had anticipated fierce resistance.
Without hesitation, he prepared to depart, leaving the shadow to detain its captive.
Just then, the darkness surrounding him brightened, illuminated by the light from the "sky."
Instinctively, Lumian looked up and witnessed the pure darkness rapidly dissolving, unveiling a colossal star hanging in the void.
The star bore a faint blue hue, resembling a demonic eye.
In an instant, Lumian felt his blood freeze, involuntarily snapping out of his shadow creature form. The big-headed "shorty," adorned with wrinkles, seized the chance to break free from its constraints, swiftly merging into the pale-blue starlight and disappearing from sight.
After a moment, Lumian fully recovered. He stared at the now-normal room, sinking into contemplation.
What in the world was that thing? It seemed so weak, yet it came to intimidate me!
Nevertheless, the blinking star held an air of peculiarity.
Why not just send the star to frighten me right away? After suppressing me, it didn't seize the opportunity to attack. Even though I regained some mobility upon escaping the shadows, I

was still relatively slow... Lumian mused silently.
While he couldn't grasp the full picture, certain details became apparent.
No wonder Giorgia didn't casually enlist a foreign adventurer with Beyonder powers to handle the humanoid lizard. Someone lurking in the shadows would interrogate me about the entire matter in the future. Only a renowned adventurer like Louis Berry, capable of hunting Demon Warlocks, can resist it.
Heh heh, earning 15,000 risot isn't a walk in the park...
The one in the shadows knows Louis Berry isn't weak, so they didn't dare to attack directly. Instead, they dispatched a small monster with unique abilities to intimidate me, hoping to extract information?
Why not go to Giorgia's house and ask? Their family doesn't seem to possess any superpowers...
Is this an internal conflict within the Fisheries Company and the Fisheries Guild?
Yes, it's an opportunity to interact more deeply with the Paco family and understand the core process of the sea prayer ritual...
Shaking his head, Lumian reclined on the bed and resumed his slumber.
Around 8 a.m. the next day, Lugano, who had gone out to buy breakfast, rushed back and said to Lumian, "Boss, those combat nuns are looking for you!"

Chapter 545: Order

Combat nuns? Amidst Lumian's surprise, he felt a sudden sense of order return to society.

In any country on the Northern Continent, wild Beyonders were unwelcome. They faced control and even apprehension. This wasn't like colonies such as Port Farim, where renowned adventurers could freely roam the streets and boast about their experiences without the concern of official Beyonders knocking on their doors.

"Boss, is there any danger?" Lugano nervously inquired, his perpetual fear evident as a wild Beyonder.

Lumian chuckled, responding confidently, "That depends on their attitude."

The implication was that the nuns were the ones facing danger.

Lumian teased, "Aren't you excited about the combat nuns? Shouldn't you be thrilled that they're here?"

Imagination isn't the same as reality... Seeing his boss showing no intention of "teleporting" away with him, Lugano nervously descended and extended an invitation to the combat nuns.

The leader was the same one Lumian had encountered before.

Most of her naturally curly, thick black hair was neatly tucked into a black hat with white patterns. Her bright and lively light-blue eyes, along with her thick eyebrows, bestowed upon her a unique and captivating charm.

The woman in leather armor gazed at Lumian and inquired gently, "Are you the adventurer Louis Berry?"

Lumian nodded. "Who might you be?"

The strikingly beautiful combat nun replied with a smile, "I'm Sister Noelia of the Fertility Order, in charge of a combat team.

"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

Noelia raised her hands to the sky, her feet slightly apart.

Observing that Noelia and the other combat nuns of the Fertility Order were not as judgmental as he expected, not viewing wild Beyonders as inherently evil creatures, Lumian smiled.

"Madame, what brings you here?"

Noelia smiled and explained, "You're a great adventurer who hunted Demon Warlock. If we hadn't known you were in Port Santa, we might not have bothered. However, now that we are aware, we must come and speak with you, reminding you to abide by the corresponding order."

"What order?" Lumian inquired, anticipating the answer while holding the golden straw hat.

The demeanor of these combat nuns made him wonder if they

were official Beyonders. They didn't directly arrest him, nor did they use stern warnings.
Is this the distinction between the Church of Earth Mother and other Churches? Emphasizing motherhood and respecting life?
Noelia's red lips formed a beautiful smile as she spoke, "In other cities, we would issue a direct warning, bringing you under our control. If you dare to resist, you could be apprehended or even eliminated.
"However, this is Port Santa, and many sea merchants here have a genuine need to resist pirates and protect their goods. We lack the manpower to safeguard them all, so we've tacitly agreed to allow them to hire Beyonder bodyguards.
"Monsieur Louis Berry, you are free to roam Port Santa, but you must adhere to three rules:
"Firstly, you cannot venture inland without our permission. To reach other cities, you need our approval. Secondly, you cannot perform any rituals in Port Santa, consume potions for advancement, or engage in mysticism experiments. Thirdly, you must refrain from using your abilities to cause chaos or catastrophe.
"Of course, if you return to Port Santa in the future, you'll need to register with us first."
It's a reasonable request, and coming from the ruling Church, it's not excessive at all... It's even simpler and easier than obtaining a firearm permit in Port Farim or other places. Of course, not applying for identification in Port Farim isn't a big deal. No one will report it, and there won't be any issues if you don't directly encounter the officials... Lumian nodded gently and replied,
"Sure thing."
At this moment, Lumian's thoughts raced, and he couldn't help but chuckle.
"But Port Santa isn't entirely safe. I encountered a monster last night..."
He briefly recounted how the little monster had disguised itself as a devil to intimidate him. While he didn't conceal that he had accepted Giorgia's commission, he refrained from specifying the details.
Noelia listened attentively and responded without surprise, "We'll handle it. Try not to get involved in the Fisheries Guild's matters in the future. Their internal issues will be resolved internally."
Does this mean that the Earth Mother Church refrains from interfering with the internal strife of the Fisheries Guild, allowing them complete autonomy? Lumian smiled and said,
"I'll do my best to avoid participation, but I'll reserve the right to

defend myself and counterattack."
Noelia didn't offer any further comments. Her smile faded as she led the combat nuns to the door.
In just two or three steps, she smoothly drew a straight sword from her back, half-turned, and slashed at Lumian.
The series of movements flowed seamlessly, occurring in the blink of an eye.
Lumian stared at the sword beam, neither dodging nor raising his hand to block.
With a swoosh, the straight sword grazed the tip of his nose and pointed to the ground.
Noelia smiled radiantly and nodded in satisfaction.
"As expected of a great adventurer. Your foresight, judgment, and courage are exceptional."
She then turned around and addressed the combat nuns who followed her.
"This is a true man. Those who only know how to flaunt their muscles and swing their swords can only be called male beasts."
As they spoke, the combat nuns exited Lumian's rented suite.
Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his chin, feeling a strange sensation.
The sight of women openly scrutinizing men made him uncomfortable.
After watching Noelia and the nuns leave, Lugano lowered his voice and asked, "Boss, did a little monster really come to warn you last night?"
"That's right. If you were the one who completed Giorgia's commission, it might not be just a warning." Lumian put on the golden straw hat and casually remarked as he walked towards the door, "We have an obligation to remind our employer that someone is secretly spying on their family."
Lugano was taken aback for a moment before understanding Lumian's intentions. He grabbed Ludwig and followed closely behind.
...
21 Saint Lana Street, in the activity room of a suite on the fifth floor.
Lumian encountered Giorgia once again.
Dressed in a vibrant dress adorned with intricate patterns, the lady glanced at the boy, whose appetite exceeded her imagination, before turning her gaze to the adventurer, Louis Berry.
"What brings you here?"
Lugano translated professionally.
"Last night, a monster came to intimidate me, but I chased it

away." Lumian briefly recounted the monster's appearance and behavior.
Upon hearing Lugano's account, Giorgia displayed no obvious surprise. After a few seconds of contemplation, she said, "Wait a moment."
Leaving the maid and valet behind, she disappeared into an inner room.
After a few minutes, she reappeared, arm in arm with a man.
The man seemed to be in his forties, tall and gaunt, his eyes a nearly translucent blue. His grayish-black, slightly curly hair cascaded over his shoulders like an artist's. His appearance couldn't be described as particularly good or bad, yet he possessed an unforgettable quality.
"This is my husband, Rubió Paco," Giorgia introduced.
The shareholder of the Fisheries Company and a committee member of the Fisheries Guild? Lumian had gathered information about the Paco family through Lugano over the past two days.
Rubió's father had initially been a prosperous fisherman who shared a boat with others. After marrying Martha, who had once been a Maiden of the Sea, he gradually established himself. Not only did he manage the Fisheries Company for a time, but he also ascended to become a committee member of the oldest local guild, the Fisheries Guild.
Shortly after the sea prayer ritual last year, the old gentleman passed away. With strong support from Matriarch Marta, Rubió inherited his father's status and became the youngest committee member of the Fisheries Guild.
However, he no longer held a specific position at Port Santa Fisheries Company. He only held onto the shareholders' voting rights and dividends.
This middle-aged man had once been rebellious. He was expected to comply with his parents' arrangements and marry a Maiden of the Sea. However, he remained single until his early thirties and then married Giorgia, the daughter of a textile merchant. If it were any other prominent family, the matriarch would have surely intervened and perhaps even banished Rubió. Yet, Martha indulged him and eventually chose to compromise.
Before Lugano could commence with the translation, Rubió spoke in less fluent Intisian, "We can communicate directly. When I was young, I often took a boat out to sea and visited places like Port Farim."
"Monsieur Rubió, I don't think there's a need for communication, and I don't intend to find out why the monster came looking for me. I'm just here to inform you about this." Lumian glanced at the

puzzled Giorgia and suspected that Rubió had switched to Intisian not out of politeness but to keep his wife in the dark about something.
Rubió nodded gently and said, "I understand your concerns. I merely wish to entrust you with another mission."
"What mission?" Lumian asked with a smile.
Rubió calmly replied, "My mother, Martha, hails from Milo Village. Recently, she wishes to return and meet the current Governor of the Sea to request his permission to seek treatment at the Church of Earth Mother. Yes, my mother hasn't been in good health recently. She can't get out of bed."
Martha is still alive? Lumian was slightly surprised.
Experienced as he was, he deduced that the monster might have been transformed by Martha, based on the absence of the matriarch, the Paco family's reluctance to expose the humanoid lizard, and the fact that she was once a Maiden of the Sea!
The sea prayer ritual wasn't just an honor for the Maidens of the Sea. Perhaps there was also hidden corruption that might erupt at some point in time.
But now, from what Rubió had said, Martha was still alive. Previously, she had only been seriously ill.
Where did that humanoid lizard come from? Lumian suppressed his puzzlement and asked in confusion, "Why does Madame Martha need the Governor of the Sea's permission to seek treatment?"
Rubió's expression shifted, a mix of disgust and resistance evident in his words.
"All Maidens of the Sea have to follow the orders of the Governor of the Sea when dealing with Church-related matters. Failing to do so would be blasphemous to the sea prayer ritual."

Chapter 546: Monitor

Following the Governor of the Sea's orders holds more weight than reverence for the Church... The Earth Mother Church appears indifferent. Lumian chose not to push further. He nodded subtly and stated, "I'll take on this commission without expecting compensation, but I do have a request."

"What might that be?" Rubió asked cautiously.

A cunning smile formed on Lumian's lips.

"I'm here to witness the sea prayer ritual, but I've heard only a select few can observe its core segments. I seek such an opportunity."

Rubió remained silent for a prolonged moment.

Giorgia, unable to contain her curiosity, questioned her husband in Highlander about the conversation and his concerns.

Lugano seized the chance to approach Lumian and translated the couple's exchange.

Lumian's eyebrows twitched imperceptibly upon hearing they were genuinely considering allowing him to pose as a sailor and board the special sacrificial ship.

Is Rubió Paco truly considering my request?

I'm merely offering an outrageous deal to test if I can glean details about the sea prayer ritual. I don't intend to leverage this seemingly straightforward task to gain access to the last two segments of the ritual!

It remained a secret harbored by the Fisheries Guild for over a millennium, the wellspring of their power and prestige!

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he strongly suspected that the commission to send Madame Martha to Milo Village to meet the current Governor of the Sea carried a high risk. It wasn't a task for any random Beyonder. Therefore, Rubió Paco was reluctant to let go of Louis Berry, the proven adventurer.

But where could the danger lie? This is Port Santa, not the islands on the sea or the remote towns of the Southern Continent. Which Beyonder would dare to attack me on the streets in broad daylight? Aren't they afraid of being captured by the combat nuns and turned into fertilizer for the land? One can't underestimate the power of an orthodox Church!

Unless someone possesses a special ability, like Loki's, to kill me undetected on the bustling streets, or if a Saint with godhood personally takes action, aiming to end the battle before the Church of Earth Mother reacts... But it can't be that exaggerated. It's such a trivial matter... As Lumian pondered, Rubió and Giorgia reached a conclusion.

The former said to Lumian, "I cannot permit your participation in the last two segments of the sea prayer ritual. It is a blasphemy against the sea. Those involved will face expulsion from Port Santa, including their family.
"However, I am willing to allow you to conceal yourself in Milo Village in advance and witness the ancient performances during the vigil ritual."
So, I can't directly witness the vigil ritual, but I can partake in the accompanying folklore performance? Did Ultraman, Bard, and Mad Lady use a similar method to approach the core of the sea prayer ritual and complete the most crucial part of the prank? Lumian noticed that Rubió had already made a significant concession and no longer insisted. He smiled and replied, "Deal."
Without waiting for a response, he "kindly" suggested, "Let's send Madame Martha to Milo Village today, shall we? We mustn't delay when it comes to illnesses. Get her treatment as soon as possible."
Rubió hesitated for a moment before saying, "My mother is already asleep. She's been resting a lot lately. Forcing her awake will impact her body and mind. How about tomorrow morning?"
Is some advanced preparation needed? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.
"No problem."
He cast a quick glance at Lugano, and his heart skipped a beat.
"Monsieur Rubió, my interpreter is, in fact, an excellent doctor. Moreover, he doesn't adhere to the beliefs of the Earth Mother, nor is he affiliated with any Church. If he were to treat your mother, you probably wouldn't need to seek the Governor of the Sea's permission in advance."
Lumian emphasized the word "doctor."
Without hesitation, Rubió Paco shook his head and said, "We trust the Church's doctors more. My mother is my most important family. I don't want her to take any unnecessary risks."
What he implied was that he couldn't vouch for the medical skills of the interpreter. He couldn't use the Paco family's matriarch as an experiment.
Lumian was actually looking forward to sending Madame Martha to Milo Village because it meant he might meet the current Governor of the Sea and have a chance to learn something. He had only suggested that Lugano treat the matriarch to test Rubió.
The result of the probe revealed many hidden secrets in this matter!
Having agreed to escort Madame Martha and her maid to the Governor of the Sea at 9 a.m. the following day, Lumian led Ludwig and Lugano out of the main house at 21 Saint Lana Street. Giorgia

walked them all the way to the door.
Lumian nonchalantly remarked, "Does the Governor of the Sea have to reside in Milo Village?"
With Lugano's translation, Giorgia nodded slightly and said, "The Governor of the Sea resides in the building where the vigil ritual is held every night. He can move freely during the day, but he can't leave Port Santa."
The building where the vigil ritual is held? The essence of the vigil ritual is to allow a quasi-Governor of the Sea to enter the residence and replace the former Governor of the Sea, waiting to be officially appointed by the sea the next day? Lumian speculated, combining his mysticism knowledge.
He smiled and asked, "What are the perks of being Governor of the Sea?"
After hearing the translation, Giorgia fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "Among the fishmongers, the merchants, he's already the true governor in their eyes."
It wasn't an answer, just a whisper of truth.
Lumian nodded without pressing further. He led Ludwig and Lugano through the iron gates.
After taking a few steps along the verdant path in the forest, he suddenly looked up.
On a branch stood a gray-feathered myna.
Lumian gave it a cursory glance and continued on, his steps brisk towards the waiting carriage.
After a while, the myna flapped its wings and flew up. After circling a few times, it circled a house two streets away before dipping down towards an open window.
It landed on a middle-aged man's forearm and spoke in precise Highlander, "Louis Berry is back at the Paco house! He stayed nearly half an hour!"
The middle-aged man, dressed in gray clothes with disheveled brown hair, resembling a suburban farmer, fed the myna a few self-made rice grains and said, "Observe further and see if Rubió Paco and Giorgia will go out today."
After the myna flew out of the window, the middle-aged man exhaled and turned around.
Suddenly, his eyes froze as he saw someone sitting in the only armchair!
The man had black hair and green eyes, wearing a white shirt, a black vest, dark pants, and a golden straw hat.
Louis Berry!
Adventurer Louis Berry!
The middle-aged man's back arched slightly, and his feet parted

slightly, but he took no further action.
Lumian leaned back in his chair and engaged in casual conversation in Intisian, as if he had been expected.
"What did you have your bird spy on?"
The middle-aged man fell silent for a moment before speaking in somewhat awkward Intisian, "Watch if anyone enters or exits Paco's house, and see if there's anything unusual there."
"Very honest." Lumian nodded approvingly. "Who asked you to do it?"
He was pleased that the other party knew some Intisian. Otherwise, he could only rely on key words to communicate or capture him to have Lugano translate.
"Juan Oro," the middle-aged man replied without hesitation.
Juan Oro... The president of the Fisheries Guild and the former village chief of Milo Village? Lumian smiled and said, "I'm surprised you're so forthright."
The middle-aged man forced a smile and said, "I don't think I'm stronger than Demon Warlock and can defeat you."
"That's right. Those who understand the situation and themselves can live longer." Lumian crossed his right foot over his left leg. "Why is Juan Oro monitoring the Paco family?"
"I don't know, and there's no need for me to know. I'll receive a reward as long as I pass on what I see," the middle-aged man replied sincerely.
Lumian gazed at him for a few seconds before saying, "Did you send that little monster last night?"
The middle-aged man was taken aback.
"What little monster? What happened last night?"
Lumian chuckled and stood up without explaining.
"What's your name?" he asked as he walked towards the door.
The middle-aged man hesitated for a moment before answering truthfully, "Sanches."
Lumian opened the door, walked out, and disappeared from Sanches's sight.
...
Upon his return to Solow Motel, Lumian noticed a folded letter resting on the master bedroom's desk.
Skillfully unfurling it, he found the distinct handwriting of Madam Magician.
"You can share those matters with the Two of Cups, but avoid delving into excessive detail.
"I refrained from elaborating on the voices you heard and the fragments of civilization you glimpsed earlier as they remain too advanced for your understanding. Simply remember not to heed

random sounds or sights in an ancient ruin like Fourth Epoch Trier. Also, caution your Warlock associates—
it's acceptable to occasionally take in the Hidden Sage's indoctrination, but they mustn't fully believe in Him. His state is precarious."
After incinerating the letter, Lumian contemplated for a moment and decided to "teleport" back to Trier to inform Franca in person and avert any potential mishaps.
...
Trier, nestled within the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai.
As Lumian materialized, Franca and Jenna were engrossed in perusing a stack of ancient information from an unknown source.
"Hey, could you 'teleport' outside and knock? It's quite startling when you suddenly appear like that!" Franca nearly tensed the formless spider silk she'd permanently set up in the room.
Lumian chuckled and remarked, "With a Witch's spiritual perception, what's the difference between me 'teleporting' outside the door and appearing in the living room?"
"Why the sudden return?" Franca paused before asking, "Madame Magician said you could share about that matter?"
"What's going on?" Jenna queried, looking puzzled.
She stood up and prepared to leave.
"Yes," Lumian replied to Franca's question, but he made no attempt to stop Jenna from leaving.
Nor did Franca intervene.
Once Jenna had retreated to her bedroom, Lumian turned to Franca and disclosed, "When they discussed the wilderness dream, it made me recall the voices and visions I encountered in Fourth Epoch Trier. They're connected to the Celestial Master!"

Chapter 547: Source of Familiarity

"Is this related to the Celestial Master?" Franca's interest piqued.
Confusion enveloped her.
"In the Fourth Epoch Trier, what did you see or hear that we didn't?"
Everyone had been together unless it was before they met, but Jenna should have been aware!
Without pausing for Lumian's response, Franca contemplated for a moment and suggested, "Could it be the aftereffects of using the Eye of Truth?"
She recalled Lumian's abnormal behavior during that time.
"Yes, that's right." Lumian nodded, pulled up a chair, and settled down. He described the collision of two rocks, sparks flying, and the ensuing blaze that engulfed dry leaves and withered branches, amid echoing voices chanting "Celestial Master."
The more Franca listened, the more her focus intensified. Uncharacteristically, she refrained from interrupting.
As she listened, her gaze gradually shifted, seemingly lost in reminiscence and distant thought.
Once Lumian finished recounting, Franca remained motionless for what felt like an eternity, frozen like a mechanical doll paused mid-action.
After several seconds, she abruptly straightened up, pinched her nose, and forced a smile.
"As anticipated, the Celestial Master is part of our world.
"The fragments of civilization you received bear a striking resemblance to some aspects of my country's history, yet there are differences... Could it be the true history concealed beneath the surface?
"The Celestial Master is attempting to interfere and breach into this world, wielding significant influence over the Mystery Pryer and Savant pathways, much like the way the Celestial Worthy affects Seers, Apprentices, and Marauders?
"Could the depravity among some of the monks in the Deep Valley Cloister and the peculiar state of the Hidden Sage be linked to the Celestial Master?"
Franca's thoughts crystallized as she spoke, her eyes sparkling like a serene lake.
"That's my hunch too," Lumian concurred with Franca.
Franca rose and paced, seemingly alone, contemplating how to follow this trail and unveil the truth behind the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's transmigration.
After a few minutes, she muttered to herself, "The connection

between the two worlds is stronger than I expected. It's not just through the River Styx...
"We should still be able to find many traces of the interaction between the two worlds..."
Franca halted her pacing and fixed her gaze on Lumian.
"When we grow stronger and amass enough gold, I want you to summon Chen Tu again, the Armored Shadow. He should possess some insight into the Celestial Master."
"Alright," Lumian agreed.
Franca lapsed into silence once more, her mind retracing an unknown memory.
A few moments later, she produced four brass metal plates and handed them to Lumian.
"The Language Comprehension charms you wanted. The one with the most intricate patterns allows you to understand the languages of the Southern Continent. The others are for the ancient Feysac language family. The activation incantation is the word 'knowledge' in ancient Hermes."
She and the Bear had completed the delivery through Madame Hela's messenger. The other party proved quite efficient.
After Lumian handed Franca the money, he "teleported" out of Trier and back to Port Santa.
In the hushed aftermath, Jenna cautiously opened the bedroom door and stuck her head out.
"Has Lumian left?"
"Yes," Franca replied, her emotions subdued.
Jenna glanced at her but didn't press for more information. Instead, she redirected the conversation to the stack of information related to the underground tomb.
Late at night.
Franca returned to her room.
Glancing at the small analyzer, the accompanying typewriter, and the radio transceiver, she didn't sit down to chat as usual. Instead, she climbed into bed.
Sitting in the middle of the bed, leaning against the pillow, hugging her legs and curling up, Franca's gaze unfocused on the crimson moon and stars outside the window.
Lumian's words today plunged her into nostalgia, but the more her emotions fluctuated, the less she wanted to reveal vulnerability. She endured it, pretending to have recovered.
Only when solitude enveloped her, as the night fell silent and the seemingly eternal stars adorned the sky, did she shed her thick "armor" and sink deep into her emotions.
After an indeterminate amount of time, Franca lowered her head,

burying her face between her knees.
That night, she delved into a multitude of dreams. Broad shoulders carried her as a child, a touch of white hair at the temples, dishes not particularly delicious but always suited her tastes. Pure emotions of her youth, memories of being the "atmosphere livening machine," and her "broadminded" self all danced in fragmented sequences...
As her two decades unfolded in her dreams, she unknowingly opened her eyes, feeling the coldness on her face. Reluctant to move, she lingered in the moment.
Suddenly, a recollection struck her.
Back on the fourth level of the catacombs, she and Jenna had encountered a man who seemed strangely familiar.
Initially, she believed that the original owner of her body had encountered him. Now, the reason for his familiarity became clear.
The man bore an uncanny resemblance to someone from her home country before transmigration!
Despite altering his appearance to thwart immediate recognition, Franca was now certain that his facial features differed from those she had encountered in this world. Softer, less chiseled!
With a mix of fear and excitement, Franca sat up and pondered, Could it be that, aside from us transmigrating souls, there are others who physically transmigrated? Or has someone mastered the ability to freely traverse between both worlds?
...
After breakfast, Lumian stepped into the master bedroom's washroom and retrieved a low-level Language Comprehension charm from his Traveler's Bag.
"Knowledge," he whispered in ancient Hermes.
The brass-like charm ignited with bluish-green flames and swiftly vanished.
Instantly, Lumian felt an abnormal clarity in his mind, as if an avalanche of additional knowledge had flooded in, unveiling the structural origins and connections of numerous words.
Today's agenda: a visit to the oldest fishing village, perhaps meeting the Governor of the Sea. Mastering Highlander in secret seemed imperative to avoid missing crucial clues!
The charm's effects would last for seven days.
Leaving the bedroom, Lumian took Ludwig and Lugano to 21 Saint Lana Street in a rental carriage, where they met Martha, the matriarch of the Paco family.
Martha didn't look like she was in her sixties, with only faint wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, appearing more in her early

fifties based on her eyes, nose, mouth, and brows. Her features retained a unique charm.
At that moment, the old lady with grayish-black hair and light-blue eyes wore a black, widow-like dress and a dark, old-styled bonnet. Pale-faced, she was supported by two young maids as they boarded a four-wheeled, four-
seater carriage.
"Monsieur Berry, I'll be relying on you," Rubió Paco nodded at Lumian beside the carriage.
He was to accompany his mother to Milo Village to meet the Governor of the Sea.
Lumian directed Ludwig to Giorgia.
"Please keep an eye on him until I return from Milo Village."
Rubió translated this time.
Giorgia smiled and replied, "Don't worry, I'll make sure there's plenty of food."
She had already realized that this boy had the appetite of two or three adults, but as the godson of a great adventurer, it was understandable that he was special.
Lumian wasn't concerned about Ludwig's treatment in the Paco household. He feigned his understanding of Highlander and waited for Lugano's translation before saying, "A meal every two hours."
With that, he sat on the right side of the carriage driver and didn't enter the carriage. Seeing this, Lugano had no choice but to choose the seat to the left of the carriage driver.
Before doing so, he diligently translated Lumian's final instructions.
Although he didn't know what would happen if Ludwig starved, he felt that it wouldn't be good, so he emphasized it twice.
As the carriage set off, Giorgia processed the translation.
"A meal every two hours? Two hours?"
The Paco family's carriage rolled along the grayish-white stone-paved street. Lumian leaned against the carriage wall, retracted his right leg, and stepped on the edge of the carriage driver's seat.
Lugano glanced at him, feeling a bit uneasy.
A seasoned bounty hunter, Lugano sensed something awry in this seemingly ordinary mission that prompted Rubió to assist his employer in hiding in Milo Village.
His heart raced as he observed armed pedestrians on the street, fearing an imminent attack from the crowd.
Under the October sun still blazing in Port Santa, the streets, damp from the previous night's heavy rain, hadn't completely dried. Lugano yearned to reach Milo Village quickly.

Glancing at Lumian, he noticed that Lumian had narrowed his eyes. Lowering his straw hat, Lumian seemed to be peacefully napping, showing no signs of nervousness.
Phew... With a powerhouse like him around, there shouldn't be a problem... Lugano silently reassured himself.
The carriage headed north, leaving Port Santa and reaching a village nestled against the Dariège mountain range, overlooking the azure sea.
Fishing boats set off, accompanied by the resonant singing and chirping of seabirds.
Milo Village's buildings exuded a historic feel. Brown, yellow, and beige stone-brick outer walls, blackened at the lower half, gave them character. Though the wooden components had been replaced, weeds still clung.
A small cathedral belonging to Earth Mother stood near the mountain, and facing the fishing village dock was the Governor of the Sea's residence.
The four-story building, with a white backing and gray bricks, resembled a cathedral and a sacrificial ground more than a human residence.
As they arrived safely at their destination, Lugano sighed in relief and jumped off the carriage. Two maids supported Madame Martha as they headed toward the Governor of the Sea's building, accompanied by Rubió Paco.
Suddenly, Lugano heard his employer's voice.
"Take a look at what's wrong with that old lady."
Uh... Lugano glanced at Lumian, who had appeared beside him, wearing a golden straw hat. He raised his hand and gently tapped his forehead, activating his Spirit Vision.
Observing Madame Martha's back for a few seconds after she entered the Governor of the Sea's residence, he frowned and said, "Most notably is the excessive loss of blood and weak vitality..."
Lugano hesitated before concluding, "It doesn't look like illness. It looks more like an injury."

Chapter 548: Governor of the Sea

Injured? Injured by the humanoid lizard? Lumian made a casual guess after hearing Lugano's judgment.

He stood by the carriage, his gaze naturally surveying the surroundings of the Governor of the Sea's residence.

The location was close to the fishing village's docks, with boats sailing into the sea and fishing nets secured to the reefs. Around nearby houses, women were busy processing seafood, turning them into salted fish and jerky. Children ran along various village roads, playing games.

Though different from Cordu, the essence of the scene remained similar.

In front of the Governor of the Sea's residence stretched a sizable square where Lumian and the others awaited Madame Martha, Rubió Paco, and their emergence.

Children gathered in a corner, arranging numerous shells and engaging in an acting game.

The eldest, dressed in a linen shirt, declared, "I'm the Governor of the Sea!"

"I'll be the guard!"

"I'm the mother," the other children replied.

The youngest hopped around, asking, "What about me? What about me?"

The child playing the role of the Governor of the Sea pondered for a moment and said, "You can be the Child of the Sea."

Child of the Sea? What's that? Lumian, though not looking, listened intently to the children's discussion.

These kids may not understand many terms, but their lack of confidentiality made them unwitting carriers of information. The adults in Milo Village wouldn't be overly vigilant against such young children, who might inadvertently reveal details remembered in their daily games.

Recalling his experiences in Cordu, Lumian recognized the value of sounding out children and playing games with them. It was a subtle way to glean insights into family matters.

After absorbing the children's discussions and gauging the time, Lumian adjusted his golden straw hat and headed straight for the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Lugano was taken aback and swiftly followed Lumian.

Two "guards" in brownish-green shirts and pants, each armed with a rifle, blocked the entrance of the cathedral and sacrificial ground, fixing their gaze on Lumian.

"Halt!" the "guards" shouted.

Undeterred, Lumian continued forward, speaking in Intisian nonchalantly, "I don't understand what you're saying."
With a swoosh, the two "guards" raised their rifles, aiming at the outsider in the golden straw hat.
Lugano hurriedly translated, "They won't let you in."
Ignoring his guide, Lumian neither sped up nor slowed down as he approached the white building with gray bricks.
A cold glint flickered in the blue eyes of the two "guards" as they squeezed their triggers.
At that moment, the outsider in the golden straw hat vanished from their sight.
He melded into the sunlit shadows of the governor's residence.
In the next instant, Lumian reappeared from a shadow in the foyer behind them and continued walking.
It was as if the distance between them had been erased.
The two "guards," with keen senses, quickly turned around, peering behind them. However, Lumian had already entered the building, leaving the foyer.
Outside, Lugano stood in a daze, uncertain whether to take the risk of following and acting as a translator or to prioritize his own safety.
After passing through the foyer, Lumian suddenly noticed the space ahead darkening. The dome, just over ten meters tall, emanated an inaccessible aura. Aqua-blue walls adorned with various reliefs caught his eye. Unlike the typical statues of Angels and Saints, these depicted objects from the sea—
starfish, corals, numerous fish, lobsters, and crabs.
Simultaneously, Lumian sensed the reliefs coming to life, casting a dangerous gaze at him.
No, they weren't alive. The building itself seemed alive, instinctively rejecting intruders and exerting layers of pressure.
Lumian's steps instantly became heavy, as if burdened by hundreds of kilograms of food.
Within his field of vision, Martha, the Paco family's matriarch, knelt diagonally on the ground with her legs crossed. Rubió Paco stood at a distance. The two maids also knelt, their backs turned towards the entrance hall, as if unwilling to look at a certain important figure.
Directly opposite the high dome lay a "carpet" made of fish skin. A young man in a retro white robe reclined on it, propping himself up with his elbows as he quietly observed Martha.
Four other beautiful women adorned the "carpet." One knelt behind the lad, serving as his cushion. Another peeled late-ripened grapes and delicately fed them to the lad. The remaining two held trays

with alcohol, food, and towels, each standing in a separate spot. Their pregnant bellies were unmistakably visible, radiating a maternal glow.
Upon Lumian's sudden entrance, the lad appeared alarmed, sitting up straight and seeking solace in the embrace of the woman behind him.
Sensing the abnormality, Rubió turned around and saw the adventurer he had hired, Louis Berry.
His pupils dilated slightly as he urgently spoke in Intisian, "Why did you come in?"
Only then did Lumian pause and smile.
"I'm a professional adventurer. You've been inside for too long. I'm worried something might happen."
As he spoke, Lumian sensed dangerous gazes from various parts of the building.
Rubió fell silent for a moment before saying, "Don't worry. Just wait outside for us to come out."
"Alright," Lumian chuckled, turned around, and sauntered into the foyer, acting as if the dangerous gazes didn't exist.
Back in the foyer, he faced the two "guards" and their rifles without giving them a glance as he walked past.
The expressions of the "guards" shifted, but they refrained from firing, allowing Lumian to exit the Governor of the Sea's residence.
Lugano breathed a sigh of relief, grateful he wouldn't be hunted down by the people of Milo Village.
Despite being a Beyonder, facing more than one armed soldier still made him uneasy.
Glancing at Lumian, he hesitated to ask why his employer insisted on barging in.
Lumian settled back beside the carriage driver, tucking in his legs with one bent and the other extended, allowing his right arm to rest on it.
After nearly ten minutes, Rubió Paco and his mother, Martha, emerged from the cathedral-like building.
Rubió took a deep look at Lumian and said, "Let's go. The Governor of the Sea has agreed to let my mother receive treatment at the Church."
Is that lad the current Governor of the Sea? He looked weak and appeared panicked. How can he protect Port Santa's fishermen and sea merchants for a year? Or does he lack abilities but possess a special symbol? Did the April Fool's prank cause an accident at last year's sea prayer ritual? This Governor of the Sea might have failed to receive the sea's boon or appointment, but the Fisheries Guild members conceal the matter to avoid causing panic, treating him

as the real Governor of the Sea. He must know about what happened back then... Lumian nodded thoughtfully.
He smiled and asked Rubió in Intisian, "Then, should we thank Earth Mother for Her love and care or the Governor's approval?"
Rubió didn't respond and followed his mother, Martha, into the carriage.
Lugano hurriedly took a seat on the other side of the carriage driver, watching as the horse circled around and changed direction, gradually departing from the Governor of the Sea's residence.
Phew... Lugano sighed from the bottom of his heart.
This commission doesn't seem dangerous...
Apart from his employer insisting on barging into the Governor of the Sea's residence, there were no surprises.
Lumian chuckled and remarked, "That's because I'm here. If it were just you, those hidden observers might have already come knocking."
Lugano fell silent, observing as his employer pointed at the Governor of the Sea's mansion, resembling a cathedral, and uttered a phrase in Highlander word by word.
"What. Will happen if. Blown up?"
Lugano shuddered, his hair standing on end.
He glanced at the astonished carriage driver and advised his employer in Intisian, "You'll probably be hunted down by the entire Port Santa."
Lumian smiled and averted his gaze, remaining silent.
Only then did Lugano realize.
His employer was testing someone!
Why else would he use Highlander, a language he hadn't mastered yet?
He was testing the reactions of the carriage driver and Madame Martha in the carriage!
Listening to Martha and Rubió's conversation, Lumian noted the mother and son barely spoke during the journey, perhaps due to Martha's poor health, with occasional moans of pain.
As the carriage left Milo Village, the driver suddenly pulled the reins, stopping the horses.
An old man with a black cane had appeared in front of the carriage.
With dark and white hair, eyes as blue as the sea, and wearing common fishermen's clothes, the wrinkled face of the old man could have killed a mosquito with its folds.
"Mr. Oro..." the carriage driver whispered, his expression tense, uncertain how to react.

Juan Oro? Lumian thought. The president of the Fisheries Guild and the former village chief of Milo Village?
Supported by a young man resembling him, Juan Oro approached the Paco family's carriage with his cane.
In the carriage, Rubió and Martha remained silent.
At that moment, a revolver appeared on Juan Oro's forehead, pressing the cold muzzle against his flesh.
Lumian raised his chin slightly and looked at the president of the Fisheries Guild. With a calm expression, he asked, "Who allowed you to approach this carriage?"

Chapter 549: True Purpose

The young man supporting Juan Oro glanced up at Lumian, who sat beside the carriage driver with one leg bent, the other propped up. His eyes blazed with undisguised anger.

The carriage driver jumped in fright and desperately tried to distance himself from Lumian. However, with a horse in front of him and Lugano on his left, dodging proved impossible in his haste.

Lugano swallowed hard, blaming his employer for being overly aggressive.

Is he trying to imitate Gehrman Sparrow?

But his employer hadn't exhibited such madness before; instead, he seemed intelligent!

Juan Oro, an elderly man with mottled black hair, seemed oblivious to the revolver pointed at his forehead. He turned his head, stepped aside from the firearm, and continued forward.

Observing this, Lumian pulled the trigger without hesitation.

Bang!

A yellow bullet shot from the revolver, heading straight for the side of Juan Oro's head.

At some point, a palm intercepted the bullet, causing it to decelerate and spin. The bullet landed in the palm, feeling as if it had fallen into a thick swamp.

The wide, bronzed hand belonged to the young man supporting Juan Oro. He glared at Lumian, his lips curling in disdain. Then, he bellowed, "Have you lost your mind?"

Before he could finish, fiery crimson orbs, nearly white in hue, materialized right in front of him, barely a meter away. They surrounded him in a blaze.

Almost instantly, Lumian felt as though he'd been ripped from reality. The carriage disappeared from beneath him, the ground vanished from his sight, and he found himself in an endless void of darkness.

The crimson fireballs, almost white, were controlled by an unseen force and changed direction, hurtling down from their original path.

Rumble!

They collided with the roadside dozens of meters away, carving deep, massive craters.

The horses, startled, reared up, neighing in terror. The carriage driver instinctively pulled at the reins, struggling to calm the panicked animals.

The "illusion" Lumian experienced dissolved with the explosion. He

saw Juan Oro and the lad again.
Juan Oro, deeply wrinkled with his beard and hair standing on end, lifted his black cane and growled in a low voice, "Have you had enough?"
Lumian grinned and raised his revolver once more, aiming it at the president of the Fisheries Guild.
At that moment, Rubió Paco's voice echoed from the rear carriage.
"Let them through," he spoke in Intisian.
Only then did Lumian lower his arm and offer a smile in Intisian.
"My employer says you're free to pass."
He acted as if he couldn't comprehend Juan Oro and the lad's Highlander.
Juan Oro observed him for a moment before shifting his attention.
Using his cane, he circled around to the side of the carriage. The lad supporting him shot a glare at Lumian, but he was at a loss for cuss words since Lumian couldn't understand.
Juan Oro glanced at the window and calmly inquired, "Martha, I heard you're not feeling well?"
"Yes," the old lady weakly replied through the glass.
Juan Oro nodded.
"Has the Governor given you permission to seek treatment? Do you need my help in pleading your case?"
"He's already given permission," Rubió replied on behalf of his mother.
"That's good." Juan Oro nodded slightly and didn't press further.
He turned and slowly walked toward the building housing the Governor of the Sea's residence, using his cane as a crutch.
The young man supporting him shot a final glare at Lumian before refocusing on the old man.
Lumian adjusted his posture, acting as if nothing had transpired. He said to Lugano, "The carriage can continue forward."
Lugano snapped out of his daze and quickly directed the startled carriage driver to soothe the horses and exit Milo Village as soon as possible.
Without any issues, they made their way back to 21 Saint Lana Street.
Lumian retrieved Ludwig, his mouth still glistening with oil, from Giorgia and smiled at Rubió Paco.
"Remember your promise. Otherwise..."
He smiled and left the statement hanging.
"Don't worry," Rubió replied in Intisian.
After Louis Berry, his godson, and the interpreter departed, Giorgia sighed in relief and glanced at her husband.
"I've never seen a child eat so much. He must be abnormal!"

"Otherwise, Louis Berry wouldn't have let him stay with us so easily," Rubió responded, unfazed.
...
Aquina Street, Solow Motel.
After shutting the door, Lugano couldn't resist asking Lumian, "W-why were you so aggressive? He's the president of the Port Santa Fisheries Guild, a big shot. And, we're in Milo Village!"
He suspected his employer had some hidden agenda.
Lumian gave his guide a glance and grinned.
"Why else? When making a scene in public, it's unlikely both parties can go all out. It's the perfect chance to test them, see what they're made of. Trying it under the cover of night, when no one cares about the Earth Mother Church's authority and the Feynapotter government? That would be way too risky."
If Lumian had discovered that Juan Oro had godlike powers, he'd need to act quickly and call for backup!
"Ah, I see..." Lugano had an epiphany.
His employer's craziness was just a facade. Every radical move had an ulterior motive!
But why is he in Port Santa? *Is he planning something during the sea prayer ritual? Why target people from the Fisheries Guild?*
That sounds very dangerous!
Should I resign early and forget about the remaining paycheck?
Lumian observed the silent interpreter and strolled over to a reclining chair in the living room, settling in with a smile. He leaned back and relaxed.
What he'd told Lugano was just one layer of the motivations behind his recent actions—the most surface-level one.
Most importantly, Lumian aimed to send a clear message with his radical actions:
He was in Port Santa to investigate the sea prayer ritual, unafraid of the Fisheries Guild or Milo Village. He possessed the strength and courage to back it up!
Breaking into the Governor of the Sea's residence or casually pointing a gun at Juan Oro's head and firing—all of it was to convey this information.
Lumian believed there were dissatisfied people in Port Santa regarding the Fisheries Guild's sea prayer ritual. After all, the primary beneficiaries were fishermen, sea merchants, and those in related industries, not representative of the entire Port Santa population.
For instance, even though the Church of Earth Mother and the Port Santa government had allowed the Fisheries Guild autonomy and excluded outsiders from involvement, someone bold enough to

investigate, regardless of consequences, might tempt others. Could they silently or even covertly support this person to stir up trouble for their benefit?
Likewise, the beneficiaries wouldn't be united. Some gaining meant others losing; the powerful had jealous rivals. While not wanting the sea prayer ritual to end, they likely desired those in power to suffer and vacate their positions.
Lumian, by setting up a flag to investigate the sea prayer ritual and displaying decisiveness, steadfastness, and strength, didn't need to painstakingly gather clues. From his residence, he could receive various pieces of information, openly and covertly, and compare them to determine authenticity.
For an outsider with limited time, this was the fastest and most effective way to uncover the entire sea prayer ritual process and the truth about last year's accident.
For the key member of April Fool's lurking in the shadows, possibly setting a trap, this was a strategic move to draw attention to adventurer Louis Berry and raise suspicion.
In due time, armed with the acquired information and discovered clues, Lumian had a chance to expose them through their own trap.
Of course, the main drawback of this plan was its relative danger. Putting himself in the spotlight was a risk, but in the pursuit of prey, risks were inevitable. Moreover, Lumian had plenty of allies.
As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he realized that becoming a Conspirer had given him a clearer understanding of the situation and the conflicts between various groups. Using a term favored by Aurore, he developed a deeper insight into conspiracies: "The most brilliant conspiracy is an open conspiracy!" This became a key principle for his future acting.
Around 2 p.m., Lumian spotted his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, emerging from the void and handing him a letter.
Puzzled, he asked, "Who's it from?"
Haven't those he needed to communicate with already been reached?
"It's from the tall Demoness," Baynfel replied.
What's up with Franca again? Lumian took the letter and began reading.
The man she and Jenna encountered on the fourth level of the catacombs is suspected to be from the world where the Celestial Master resides—the world before her transmigration? Lumian's pupils dilated slightly.
This was different from the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society; they had transmigrated through their souls, but

these individuals had brought their bodies over!
In the midst of his surprise, Lumian pondered a crucial question.
Why would someone like that venture into the fourth level of the catacombs?
Was it because the Samaritan Women's Spring lay sealed there, along with the River Styx's overflowing water that bridged the two worlds?
Had similar individuals entered our world before? If so, why hadn't they left any trace like Emperor Roselle and the other transmigrators?
Franca and Jenna's expedition to the fourth level of the catacombs appears laden with coincidences. Not only did they uncover a new Mirror World Fragment, but they also encountered such a person.
After penning a letter to Franca, Lumian was about to request Lugano to translate today's newspapers when footsteps echoed from the corridor.
His eyebrows twitched as he pulled up an armchair, facing the door.
Knock, knock, knock. A few seconds later, a knock resounded on their suite's door.
"Who is it?" Lugano inquired.
A mature and gentle voice floated from beyond the door.
"I'm Noelia of the Fertility Order."
Upon hearing this name, Lumian leaned back slightly and offered a smile.
He sensed that his digestion of the Conspirer potion had progressed a bit further.

Chapter 550: Effects of the Sea Prayer Ritual

Lumian hesitated, embodying the character of the adventurer—Louis Berry—
grappling with the unfamiliarity of Highlander.
Once Lugano finished translating Noelia's words, he nodded gently, sporting a welcoming smile as he spoke in Intisian, "Come in, please."
Simultaneously, he rose from his seat.
Lugano, who had already reached the door, opened it.
The figure outside indeed proved to be Noelia, the combat nun of the Fertility Order. Contrary to expectation, she wasn't cloaked in black or adorned with religious headwear. Her thick, black, curly hair flowed over her brown leather armor, and her lively light-blue eyes exuded energy.
Lumian noticed the pair of straight swords strapped to Noelia's back and the revolver at her waist. Smiling, he stepped forward.
"Thank you for your assistance."
Previously dependent on Lugano's translation, Noelia replied in Intisian, "How did you know I was here to help?"
Lumian didn't conceal his intentions for today's performance. He raised his hand, pointing at his head, indicating deduction.
Of course, his gratitude stemmed from her aid in digesting the Conspirer potion.
Noelia's thick eyebrows twitched approvingly as she nodded.
Then, she turned her gaze to Lugano and Ludwig, as if seeking Lumian's opinion on whether to have them leave. Lugano's expression made it clear he preferred not to be part of it.
Sparing Lugano, Lumian gestured for him to take Ludwig outside, perhaps for street snacks.
After the two departed the suite, Lumian remarked to Noelia, "You actually know Intisian. You didn't say a word of it earlier."
Noelia replied with a smile, "We often take turns guarding the mountain passes in the southern foothills of the Pyraez mountain range."
The Pyraez range, termed by the Feynapotter Kingdom, referred to the Darième mountain range. Shepherds frequently traversed it, entering the plains and pastures of Gaia and other provinces.
Without awaiting Lumian's further inquiry, Noelia tucked her hair behind her ear and grinned.
"It's impolite to have a lady standing and chatting with you."
Only then did Lumian invite Noelia to sit on the divan while he chose the armchair.
Noelia gazed at him and continued, "Port Santa's sea prayer ritual

dates back to the late Fourth Epoch. It's over a thousand years old and can be considered ancient. The Church once purged it, relocating all relevant insiders and purifying all participants. However, less than a hundred years later, someone here began secretly conducting the sea prayer ritual again."
She didn't explain why she shared this history; it seemed like she was merely recounting.
"They didn't continue purging it afterward?" Lumian inquired.
Noelia pursed her red lips and replied with a solemn expression, "In this matter, the brass's orders are often contradictory. Sometimes, they let our Fertility Order handle it; other times, they signal us to observe for a while. All of this has been permitted by a second-in-command Blessed."
Lumian, drawing knowledge from Madam Magician, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, and other sources, had come to understand that the Earth Mother Church operated on two major systems: Favored and Blessed. Favored referred to Beyonders of the Earth and Moon pathways among clergymen. Meanwhile, Blessed encompassed Beyonders of other pathways favored by the Earth Mother. Orders from a Favored required at least one second-in-command Blessed to be valid. Without this, they risked being considered products of the influence of evil gods and demons.
Lumian found the Earth Mother Church's intricate system perplexing, seemingly designed to guard against the Favored. Nevertheless, he believed that there must be a reason behind such complexity.
Having undergone numerous experiences, he became increasingly aware that seemingly inconspicuous rules in the mystical world often held lessons etched in blood.
After a moment of contemplation, Lumian inquired, "Are you a Favored or a Blessed?"
"I'm a Blessed," Noelia replied without delving into the specifics of her pathway.
Lumian nodded slightly, indicating for her to continue.
Noelia smiled and sighed.
"After a long period of repetition, we eventually reached an unspoken agreement to allow the sea prayer ritual. At the very least, it brought prosperity to Port Santa without causing social chaos or significant disruptions beyond the participants.
"That decision was made ages ago, and while ancient dossiers provide a rough understanding, the exact reasons convincing matriarchs, presidents, and archbishops remain elusive. Essentially, the sea prayer ritual has evolved into a traditional folklore in Port Santa, fostering prosperity in maritime trade and

fisheries."
Crossing her arms over her chest, Noelia intoned with piety, "Life's precious embrace, the harvest's grace."
Lumian, intrigued, narrowed his eyes and inquired, "Why did you change the prayer gesture?"
Is there a problem?
Noelia opened her eyes and grinned.
"This was a gesture frequently used in the past, but as Earth Mother regained some lost authority, we adopted a new posture for formal occasions."
She rose, positioning her legs slightly apart, hands raised high, and passionately explained to Louis Berry as if preaching.
"The feet connect to the benevolent earth, and the palms reach towards the spiritual sky. In the middle resides the light of life. This is the domain of the Mother of All Things."
One can regain some of Their lost authority? Lumian was puzzled, but that wasn't the focal point.
Noelia settled back into her seat and continued, "While we haven't deciphered the core process of the sea prayer ritual, years of surveillance have yielded some insights.
"The Governor of the Sea, who successfully gains the sea's favor, wields the power to control this stretch of the sea, preventing shipwrecks. However, this seemingly comes at the cost of their lives and something more. Simultaneously, the ritual triggers rapid reproduction and thriving life in the area, ensuring fishermen a bountiful harvest. It also intertwines with fate; families with Maidens of the Sea in their lineage tend to experience good fortune, not just due to preferential treatment."
The sea prayer ritual's effects are intricate, wielding the power of the sea domain and influencing fate, reproduction, and abundance... Lumian struggled to grasp the reasons behind these occurrences.
Noelia peered into Lumian's face, her eyes bright yet gentle, and said, "The committee members of the Fisheries Guild, some villagers from Milo Village, and participants in the core process of the sea prayer ritual have all acquired mystical powers. We once confronted the little devils you encountered. When pursuing certain criminals, we discovered them transformed into lizard-like monsters."
Humanoid lizards? Similar to the Paco family's? Lumian hadn't anticipated obtaining any clues from Noelia.
Noelia smiled.
"Later, we found a commonality among those who can transform into lizard-

like monsters."
"What is it?" Lumian couldn't conceal his curiosity.
Noelia replied with a faint smile, "Their mothers were once Maidens of the Sea."
Maidens of the Sea's children? Child of the Sea? Which of Rubió's siblings did I kill? Not only did he transform into a humanoid lizard, but he also went mad and severely injured his mother? Lumian swiftly connected the dots, sensing he had grasped the essence of the Paco family's commission.
Yet, confusion crept in.
If this information is known to families with Maidens of the Sea, why would the Paco family conceal it from Juan Oro and other committee members in the Fisheries Guild?
Noelia didn't seek his thoughts and teased, "After confirming the link between the lizard-like monsters and the sea prayer ritual, we intentionally alerted the Fisheries Guild committee members. Since then, no such criminals have surfaced. They show discipline and restraint. This is why, at times, I understand why the brass tacitly permit the sea prayer ritual in Port Santa. The participants are more obedient and easily controlled compared to adventurers like you."
Noelia implied: "I just advised you to stay away from the Fisheries Guild. Yet, the next day, you stormed into the Governor of the Sea's residence, pointing a gun at Juan Oro's head. That's much more troublesome than those involved with the sea prayer ritual!"
Lumian smiled, choosing not to comment.
Noelia pondered for a moment, locking eyes with him.
"I'm not sure why you're investigating the sea prayer ritual, and I don't want to know. What I can say is, if your actions endanger all of Port Santa, we will step in and expel you. With that condition, we might offer some assistance."
Lumian picked up the straw hat beside him and pressed it against his chest.
"It would be an honor."
Noelia left the Earth Mother Church's objectives in this matter unspoken, and Lumian chose not to delve into it.
The combat nun of the Fertility Order rose, making her way toward the door.
With her left hand on the handle, she abruptly turned around, her eyes sparkling as she asked with a smile, "Do you want to have a child here?"
Lumian was taken aback.
"Madame, aren't you changing the subject too quickly?"
Noelia's eyes held a maternal glint as she said with pity,

"According to our assessment, the sea prayer ritual is at least as dangerous as a Saint or a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact when fully utilized for a short period. I don't know what you're up to, but once you're involved in this matter, you can't escape just because you want to.

"Before that, have you considered leaving a descendant for yourself? I can help you."

Are your Earth Mother Church's combat nuns way of inviting someone to a one-night stand so special? Lumian was momentarily speechless.

Noelia spoke sincerely, "Descendants are the continuation of our lives. Flowers wither and fall to the ground, only to bloom into a more brilliant scenery the next year. Are you really not considering having a descendant?"

"Not for now," Lumian replied with a cold expression.

Noelia expressed regret, "Whenever you think it through, come to me."

With that, she opened the door and walked out.

Chapter 551: Coming One After Another

As Lumian observed Noelia disappearing down the corridor, he pondered the idea of adding another catchphrase: "You Feynapotterians."

Nevertheless, Noelia's kindness served as a reminder that delving into the sea prayer ritual wasn't a straightforward endeavor. The associated risks demanded the Church of Earth Mother's serious consideration.

Despite this, Lumian believed that many dangers could be sidestepped, and he wasn't inclined to actively confront them.

His primary objective wasn't to unveil the truth behind the sea prayer ritual and eradicate the influence of folklore on Port Santa, preventing its inhabitants from transforming into monsters. His true goal lay in unraveling the details of the April Fool's prank to track down Ultraman and Bard, executing them one by one. With Port Santa plagued by numerous problems and abscesses, Lumian saw no need to expose them; he could withdraw in a timely manner.

Concealing his true motives was a fundamental principle of acting as a Conspirer!

This could lead others to misinterpret his decisions and react incorrectly during critical moments.

After shutting the door, Lumian grabbed the golden straw hat and settled into the recliner. Smirking at the corridor, he muttered to himself with interest, Who will be the next to provide information?

Rubió Paco, who clearly dislikes the Maidens of the Sea and detests such matters, or the families who have lost their positions as committee members of the Fisheries Guild for many years?

Beneath the bright sunlight outside the window, Lumian swiftly flipped through the textbooks he had purchased, hoping to memorize and grasp more relevant knowledge. He couldn't wait until the charms' effects wore off, leaving nothing in his mind.

About an hour later, unfamiliar footsteps echoed through the corridor.

Knock, knock, knock. Another knock resonated on his door.

"Who is it?" Lumian inquired in simple Highlander.

"The book you bought has arrived," the motel owner, Otta Guillaume, replied in Intisian.

The book I bought? *When have I ever bought a book?* Lumian pondered, standing up thoughtfully. He opened the door and received a cheaply packaged but colorful book from the old man.

The title of the book was "Travel around Feynapotter."

Lumian pretended not to get the title written in Highlander and chuckled at himself.
"I'll have to wait for my interpreter to swing back and decode it for me. Might not even wrap my head around it before I bid Feynapotter farewell by flipping through a dictionary."
Otta Sr. expressed his understanding.
"When I first landed in Port Santa, seven or eight mates shared an Intisian-
Highlander dictionary. None of us dared to venture out solo. But after hanging around a bit and pushing ourselves to chat with the locals, we gradually got the hang of it. Truth be told, Highlander's quite similar to Intisian."
Lumian chatted briefly with Otta Sr. before heading back to his room, sinking into the recliner with "Travel around Feynapotter" in hand.
He turned the book over, gripping its spine and giving it a shake.
A folded white paper tumbled out.
Lumian caught it and flicked it open with a swift motion.
Written on it was Intisian:
"The Maidens of the Sea are also not allowed to leave Port Santa or tie the knot with outsiders. But exceptions have cropped up over the years.
"Feynapotter's women dig romance before tying the knot and chase after love. The ladies of Port Santa are no different. Throughout the past millennium, plenty of Maidens of the Sea have bolted to preserve their love or freedom. Around 30 to 40 have made it out. The most recent case dates back over 20 years. A Maiden of the Sea married an Intisian and had a kid. We're unsure if she's still alive because the Fisheries Guild has been hunting her down.
"Her child's name is Nolfi. You might know her. She's already back in Port Santa."
Nolfi? Batna Comté's lover? She's actually a child of a Maiden of the Sea. She even dragged her "partner" to Port Santa to witness the sea prayer ceremony... Lumian sometimes felt something was off with Nolfi while on the Flying Bird, but he never guessed she was so tied up with the sea prayer ritual.
This made him wonder about Nolfi's real reasons for returning to Port Santa. Batna Comté might find himself in a mind-boggling mess over this romantic fling.
Lumian's eyes shifted down as he read the last line.
"Once you're out of these waters and Port Santa, the mystical powers from the sea prayer ritual weakens significantly. Against folks from other regions, the Fisheries Guild mostly wrangles

them using adventurers, bounty hunters, and professional assassins."

Is this a go ahead to meddle with the sea prayer ritual and dig into it? As long as I could slip out of Port Santa and these waters, the Fisheries Guild's committee members would be powerless against me? Lumian had no clue about the identity of the person who delivered the paper and the intel. After all, he hadn't seen many folks' handwriting in Port Santa, but he could unmistakably sense their eagerness and anticipation.

Crimson flames roared to life, consuming the white paper laden with information. Lumian reclined, sipping on Feynapotter Kingdom's famed Manzan, the top-tier white wine produced in specific regions without dilution. He absentmindedly flipped through the book "Travel around Feynapotter" penned in Highlander.

The author raved about Feynapotter Kingdom's diverse culinary delights, praising beef, mutton, and pork while expressing disdain for the local tobacco, likening it to smoking chili.

After a stretch, Lugano returned to the suite with Ludwig, bearing a stack of street snacks—roasted baby octopuses, lamb loin, fried fish, potatoes, corn omelet, and pork rolls.

Lumian had long set aside "Travel around Feynapotter." He rose and addressed Lugano,

"Don't forget to change your appearance tomorrow to fetch our new IDs. Also, figure out where Batna Comté will be in the next two days. I want to share a drink with him."

"Alright, alright." Lugano couldn't fathom why his employer suddenly wanted to locate the finely dressed adventurer, but he sensed it wasn't as simple as a casual drink.

After assigning the task, Lumian grabbed the sun straw hat and casually mentioned as he sauntered toward the door, "I'm stepping out for a bit. I'll be back before dinner."

"D-do you need any translations?" Lugano asked instinctively.

Lumian chuckled in response.

"I'm just taking a stroll, getting a feel for the terrain. No need to chat with anyone. Don't worry, I won't lose my way."

Lugano tersely acknowledged and refrained from probing further.

He trusted that his employer's adept body language skills would make simple communication a breeze.

Once out of Solow Motel, Lumian ambled down the street.

He aimed to set the stage for those attempting to reach him and see if the Fisheries Guild would seize the chance to make a move.

...

Solow Motel, fifth-floor suite.

As Ludwig polished off the fermented grape juice, he leaped from the chair and headed briskly to the washroom.
Lugano slouched on the sofa, reluctant to budge.
After tending to the child for nearly two hours, fatigue had settled in. Lugano yearned for a break. His plan was to gather intel on Batna Comté and rendezvous with the spirited Feynapotter ladies at the bar later in the night.
Ludwig entered the washroom, lifted the toilet lid, and half-closed his eyes.
As he relieved himself with determination, a slim silhouette emerged from the shadows in the corner.
The black shadow took the form of an insect, about the thickness of a finger, with long bristles on its surface resembling spoiled food.
Its bristles fluttered, extending like tentacles, reaching out to touch everything in its path.
As it twisted, the black shadow silently crept up behind Ludwig. It abruptly stood up and plunged its head into Ludwig's cervical spine.
At that moment, it caught sight of the boy's brown eyes.
Abruptly, it froze, holding its shape like a snake rearing its upper body.
Ludwig, at some point, had ceased urinating and half-turned around.
He extended his right palm and seized the black shadow.
The shadow didn't put up a fight.
In the next instant, the chubby boy, Ludwig, shoved the black shadow into his mouth.
Amidst distinct chewing sounds, the lower half of the shadow's body twisted upward, melding with the blurry flesh in front of it.
In the blink of an eye, Ludwig consumed the black shadow as if it were a bowl of Feynapotter noodles.
He licked his lips, appearing as though he wanted another serving.
...
Outside Aquina Street, in the café adorned with flowers on every table.
Along the way, Lumian stumbled upon two street brawls. He snagged a skewer of Port Santa's roasted octopuses for a quick bite, yet no one approached him discreetly, attempted to stuff him with something, or whispered secret messages. There were no covert attacks.
Under the radiant sky and brilliant sun, he chose a quiet corner in a café, ordering a glass of Torres coffee with milk, relishing its rich bitterness with patience.

As time drifted by, a woman donned in a blue veil and an exquisite dress suddenly took a seat across from Lumian.
She scanned the surroundings and swiftly raised the blue fishnet hanging from the brim of her hat.
It wasn't a woman—it was a man.
A man dressed in women's attire, with distinctive features and grayish-blue eyes that couldn't conceal the anxiety on his face.
Lumian's pupils widened.
He recognized the man in the feminine garb.
It was the current Governor of the Sea!
The same Governor of the Sea whom Martha had bowed to in the cathedral-
like building, served by numerous maids!
He sought me out? The one coming to me is actually him? Lumian was both astonished and oddly convinced that this made sense.
Noticing that the adventurer Louis Berry had identified him, the Governor of the Sea lowered the blue veil, shrouding his face once more.
Then, he hushed his voice and spoke in Highlander, filled with desire and concern, "Save me! Save me!"

Chapter 552: Fake and Reality

Lumian didn't find the current Governor of the Sea's plea for help surprising.

He raised his left hand and touched his ear. In Intisian, he asked, "What are you saying? I only understand the word 'help.'"

The current Governor of the Sea, disguised as a woman, appeared dumbfounded, as if the language barrier was unexpected.

Having racked his brains and risked his life to reach Louis Berry, the Governor of the Sea found himself unable to convey his request due to the language barrier!

Maintaining his pretense of not understanding Highlander, Lumian calmly took out a dark-red fountain pen and a stack of post-it notes, handing them over.

"Write down everything you want to say. I'll get someone to translate it."

This time, he used Intisian again but gestured with the fountain pen to guide the other party on what to do.

If the Governor of the Sea is illiterate and unable to write Highlander, it would be troublesome... I would have to resort to communicating with individual words and body language. I don't want to reveal my knowledge of Highlander yet... Lumian thought with concern.

In Intis and Feynapotter, there were numerous illiterate individuals.

The Governor of the Sea, after a brief moment of confusion, grasped Louis Berry's intentions. He took the fountain pen and note and began scribbling.

Lumian observed with a composed expression. Despite being on the opposite side, with a Hunter's vision and spatial imagination, he easily discerned the content of the written message:

"Please help me. Rescue me out of Port Santa! I'm not the true Governor of the Sea!"

Not the true Governor of the Sea... Lumian suppressed the urge to raise his eyebrows and refrained from directly asking, maintaining an appearance of complete ignorance of the words.

He desired to see what additional information the current Governor of the Sea would reveal before considering his next set of questions.

The man dressed in feminine attire paused for two seconds before continuing,

"The true Governor of the Sea died during last year's sea prayer ritual."

Dead? The genuine Governor of the Sea perished during the sea

prayer ritual? Lumian felt a sudden surge of joy at this revelation.
I can finally see the tail of the key members of April Fool's!
One consequence of their prank last year was the predetermined Governor of the Sea's failure to successfully perform the sea prayer ritual. He suffered a backlash from Beyonder powers and lost his life!
This aligned with the revelations from Otta Guillaume, the Solow Motel owner, and his son, a government department clerk, regarding an increase in shipwrecks, a decline in fish harvests, and disrupted trade.
The imposter Governor of the Sea wrote swiftly, as if fearing someone might catch up to him at any moment.
"I was chosen by Juan Oro and the Fisheries Guild to impersonate the Governor of the Sea for a year because I resemble the true Governor of the Sea. This was to prevent fishermen and sea merchants from knowing about their grave mistake and the slip-up that caused the sea prayer ritual to fail. Such a failure has not occurred in recent centuries.
"Now that I know this secret, they won't let me leave alive. After the Governor of the Sea handover ritual is completed and the vigil begins, I'll undoubtedly be killed.
"I never wanted to play the role of Governor of the Sea. It was a blasphemy against the sea, but they pointed a gun at me, claiming they had already killed someone who refused to cooperate.
"The Church and the government won't intervene in the Fisheries Guild's affairs. You're the only one daring enough to infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence and confront Juan Oro with a gun. I can only seek your help. Over the past year, I've saved up quite a bit of money. I can give it all to you—
100,000 gold risot!
"I've heard about your recent exploits. I believe you have the strength. I implore you to help me!"
Quite educated... Lumian, after studying the three completed post-it notes, sensed that the imposter Governor of the Sea differed from ordinary fishermen, vendors, or workers based on his grammar and vocabulary.
Phew... After jotting down his reasons and request, the fake Governor of the Sea set aside the fountain pen and slid three post-it notes filled with Highlander words to Lumian.
With a quick glance, Lumian contemplated using Highlander words and body language.
"Help? Your. Family?"
The fake Governor of the Sea hastily wrote down a response: "My parents passed away a few years ago. I don't have any other

relatives. I was originally an employee of the Fisheries Company."
It's no surprise Juan Oro and his associates dared to "kidnap" this person to be the Governor of the Sea. The Earth Mother Church refrains from meddling in the Fisheries Guild's internal affairs. If it affects other citizens, they will still handle it... Lumian pretended to ask first and planned to find someone later to translate the response.
"Servant girls. Pregnant?"
He inquired about the maids in the Governor of the Sea's residence and the reason for their pregnancies.
The fake Governor of the Sea, concealed behind a blue veil, displayed no change in expression. His right hand trembled slightly as he wrote: "The Governor of the Sea will receive the same treatment as the ruler of Port Santa. He can appoint anyone from Milo Village, the Fisheries Guild, and those sea merchant families as his maids and guards. He can do whatever he wants and directly visit them, enjoying the treatment an owner can receive.
"I couldn't help it."
Observing this, Lumian nearly laughed aloud.
Even in captivity, he's focused on such matters? Does he believe he can't escape and is resigned to his imminent demise? *Is he seeking enjoyment while he still can?*
The fake Governor of the Sea added: "I can also tax those people and forcefully allocate their market share, but they will listen to me. However, I dare not go too far. Otherwise, Juan Oro will privately whip me with his cane and threaten to kill me."
So, this is the source of your savings? Well, he can't control the weather or the tides. After all, he's merely a false Governor... Lumian took the fake Governor of the Sea's new post-it note and pondered for a moment before asking in a clumsy manner, "Original. Governor. Where?"
He inquired about the whereabouts of the former Governors of the Sea.
Noelia, the combat nun of the Fertility Order, hadn't raised this issue before. It was unclear if she deemed it unimportant, chose not to disclose it for some reason, or lacked the corresponding information.
The fake Governor of the Sea wrote: "I don't know. I heard a maid from Milo Village mention it before. She's Juan Oro's granddaughter. She said that all the Governors of the Sea will eventually return to the sea."
Return to the sea... That doesn't sound promising... Heh heh, designating Juan Oro's granddaughter as your maid. Are you seeking revenge for the oppression from her grandfather? And

Juan Oro agreed to it, indirectly retaliating by lashing you? Juan Oro and his sons are married to Maidens of the Sea, and there's a chance his granddaughter is a lizard-like monster... How would you feel if you knew you were sleeping with a humanoid lizard?
Lumian criticized the fake Governor of the Sea internally.
He seemed to ponder for a moment, as if unable to comprehend the other party's writing, and changed the question.
"Juan Oro. Powerful?"
The fake Governor of the Sea suddenly shuddered.
Swiftly, he wrote: "He's very powerful. He's a monster! He can suffocate people and cause them to die in pain!"
After writing this, the fake Governor of the Sea glanced at the sun outside the window. He set down the fountain pen, stood up, and bowed to Lumian.
Then, swaying in his elegant dress, he made his way toward the café's back door and departed.
He appeared anxious about his "disappearance" during the shopping trip potentially raising suspicions from the bodyguards.
Lumian observed his departure, crumpling the post-it notes into a ball in his palm.
Crimson flames trickled from between his fingers before swiftly dissipating.
After sprinkling the ashes into the bottle with flowers, Lumian picked up the partially finished Torres coffee and took a sip.
Lumian's mind raced as he analyzed the information that concerned him the most.
Is what the imposter said true? Could an ordinary person find an opportunity to escape their bodyguards and approach me? Is it possible that Juan Oro and the others secretly prompted him to set a trap for me, waiting for me to fall into it?
During the April Fool's prank, the specially crafted golden ring, lacking Beyonder powers, was concealed within the lamb's body. The lamb was taken as a sacrifice on the Governor of the Sea's ship...
Is April Fool's meant to substitute something with this ring? *Is there another sacrificial ring similar to it?*
Did the Governor of the Sea's appointment fail last year because the crucial sacrificial ring turned out to be a fake and couldn't be utilized?
This implies that key members of April Fool's or their subordinates are on the special ship. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to deceive the committee members of the Fisheries Guild and surreptitiously replace important items...
Based on the information I've gathered, there aren't many sailors

on that ship. The only passengers are the Governor of the Sea, four Maidens of the Sea, and a few individuals guiding them through the ritual. Who among them is connected to April Fool's?
The Fisheries Guild must have conducted an investigation afterward. I wonder if they've drawn any conclusions...
I can't dismiss the possibility that the deceased Governor of the Sea is linked to April Fool's. Maybe he was completely deceived, thinking that by changing the ring and causing the ritual to fail, he could avoid returning to the sea like the previous Governors of the Sea. However, Bard, Mad Lady, and Ultraman may not have cared about his life at all...
What's the purpose of April Fool's? Is it merely a prank for their own amusement, or does it harbor a deeper motive?
Ordinary April Fool's members might engage purely for entertainment. As for the key members, truth and lies are invariably intertwined...
Sitting in the café until the sun neared the horizon, Lumian donned the straw hat and leisurely made his way back to the Solow Motel.
Late at night, Lugano returned from the bar, emanating the scent of alcohol. He approached Lumian and said,
"I've inquired with adventurers and bounty hunters about Batna and his lover. They all claim not to have seen them in the past few days. As soon as they arrived at Port Santa, it was as if they vanished."
Vanished? Nolfi, being the child of a Maiden of the Sea, wouldn't be so clandestine if she were merely returning to Port Santa and the Fisheries Guild... Could she be involved in something related to the sea prayer ritual and convinced Batna to join her? Yet, they were targeted upon their return? Perhaps she possesses significant knowledge... I can't personally search for them right now. I need to be more visible as an adventurer... Lugano isn't the most reliable source... *What about Noelia, the nun?* A flurry of speculations raced through Lumian's mind.
As his thoughts raced, he suddenly realized the kind of assistance he should seek from the Knight of Swords.

Chapter 553: Half-Fairy

Lumian remained composed, not rushing to summon the messenger of the Minor Arcana, the Knight of Swords. His patience persisted as he waited for a particular individual.

Since expressing a strong desire to investigate the sea prayer ritual and taking action, only three waves of people had contacted him today, openly or covertly. Yet, the person he awaited the most had not shown up.

Maybe Rubió Paco prefers to wait until late at night when there's no one around? Shaking off his thoughts, he smiled at Lugano.

"Batna just began his fling with Nolfi. He might want to explore all the villages, towns, pastures, and vineyards around Port Santa before the sea prayer ritual. If you hear anything about him later, inform me. There's no need to deliberately inquire."

Lugano didn't think it was a big deal and smiled understandingly.

"Maybe he even took on some missions along the way—earning some bucks while traveling."

Once the interpreter and Ludwig retired to their rooms, Lumian settled into a recliner and casually perused the Highlander textbooks under the soft glow of the gas wall lamp.

As time passed, the night grew quieter.

Lumian, confirming no further intel would arrive that night, pondered the situation.

Stroking his chin, he pondered this matter.

It seems more people are observing. Unless the great adventurer's investigation makes a breakthrough and remains unscathed, they won't easily place their bets until I demonstrate greater reliability or value.

The trio who reached out today possesses distinct traits. One affiliated with the Earth Mother Church, insulated from losses even if their gamble fails. Would the Fisheries Guild risk confrontation with the cathedral and the Fertility Order?

The second, the imposter Governor of the Sea, faces high odds of death during the sea prayer ritual. He'd clutch at any chance for survival. Additionally, his lack of confidence in both the Earth Mother Church and Port Santa's government makes him value the adventurer capable of defeating the Demon Warlock more. However, his plea might be a trap by the Fisheries Guild.

The third, elusive figure hinted at useful clues without divulging the sea prayer ritual's secret...

After careful contemplation, Lumian gained deeper insight into the mindsets and choices of various factions.

Conspiracies often manipulated human emotions, exploiting the

circumstances at hand. Lumian found himself increasingly fascinated by these two aspects.
This was both a daily routine and an essential necessity.
Putting aside the Highlander textbook, Lumian returned to his bedroom.
Closing the door, a black mark on his body emitted a faint glow.
Bottle of Fiction!
Lumian enveloped the entire room within the Bottle of Fiction. The entry conditions were simple—only spirit world creatures.
Ripple-like light briefly adorned the walls, floor, and ceiling of the bedroom before swiftly vanishing, leaving everything appearing entirely ordinary.
Only then did Lumian compose the letter and arrange the ritual. He sanctified the dagger, erected a wall of spirituality, and lit the candle representing him.
Stepping back, he spoke in ancient Hermes, "I!"
Then, switching to Hermes, he said, "I summon in my name:
"A peculiar creature wandering above the world, a half-fairy who fiddles with melodic strings, a messenger that belongs solely to the Knight of Swords..."
The orange candle flame transformed instantly into a deep blue hue, expanding to half the size of a human.
In the blue radiance, a figure of blood-red hue emerged from the candle flame.
Resembling a female human in form, it shared traits with a creature Lumian had encountered in Cordu's ruins. Devoid of skin or external coverings, it exposed bloody muscles, bluish-black blood vessels, ghastly white tendons, oily yellow fat, and large red or white fascia.
Lumian studied the 1.7-meter-tall Knight of Swords messenger and pondered silently, Does Half-Fairy mean it's divided internally?
I assumed it would be either split vertically or horizontally...
Don't you know how to fiddle with melodic strings? *Where are they?*
With these musings racing through his mind, Lumian handed the folded letter to the messenger and politely uttered in Hermes, "Kindly deliver this to the Knight of Swords."
As his strength grew, Lumian became increasingly aware that most messengers he encountered could be lethal—if unafraid to unleash the corruptive source, Termiboros.
Though Lumian couldn't gauge the strength of the Knight of Swords' messenger—the Half-Fairy—all his experience urged him to maintain politeness.
The black and white eyeballs of the Half-Fairy, embedded in the

blood-
colored face, darted around before gently nodding and accepting the letter.
It spoke with a clear, pleasant voice akin to a mountain stream's flow, "I'll deliver it promptly."
How melodious. It's like a bard strumming a guitar... Lumian snapped out of his reverie.
He suddenly grasped the reason for the messenger's melodic string prefix.
"Thank you." He bowed politely.
Observing the Half-Fairy about to retreat into the blue candle flame, Lumian couldn't suppress his curiosity and inquired, "What would you do if given human skin?"
The Half-Fairy fixed its black-and-white eyes on Lumian for a few seconds.
As it delved into the blue candle flame, it left behind a melodious voice, "I'll put it on."
You'll embody whoever's skin you wear? Has the Half-Fairy always sought its other half? Lumian speculated.
At that moment, he recalled an unfinished promise.
Help the Abscessed Hand find its body!
This pledge determined whether Lumian could attain godhood and advance to Sequence 4. However, being only a Sequence 6, he wasn't in a rush.
...
Late at night, in Trier's market district, within an empty room.
Franca, clad in an assassin suit, was having her first face-to-face encounter with 007.
As moments drifted by, 007 strode in, sporting a brown lion headgear and a double-breasted coat.
After confirming his identity, Franca pushed back her hood, emerging from the shadows.
"What brings us to this in-person discussion?" 007 inquired, his brow furrowed.
His instincts screamed to decline, yet he sensed the gravity of the situation. Failing to act promptly could result in a colossal catastrophe.
Ultimately, he acceded to Hidden Blade's request for a meeting.
Franca chuckled, emotions swirling within.
"It's a good thing."
"I'm skeptical when it comes from you, Hidden Blade," 007 expressed his concern openly.
Franca clarified her reason for requesting an "offline" meeting, "It's true. I need your help to find someone. Telegrams can't convey a

portrait. I can't craft a digital image using just words and dots, can I?"
007 regarded Franca with suspicion.
"Simply seeking help to locate someone? No ulterior motives?"
Franca chuckled.
"For now, that's all I can divulge."
"That only heightens my apprehension." 007 keenly sensed the search for this individual might harbor a crucial issue. Otherwise, Hidden Blade, having witnessed catastrophic events, wouldn't have taken it so seriously. She wouldn't have insisted on an offline meeting and handing over the portrait personally. More likely, she would have left it somewhere for retrieval.
Franca produced a portrait, drawn through dream divination and ritualistic magic, and passed it to 007.
Upon receiving it, 007's hand naturally emitted a sunlight-like glow, revealing the photo-like drawing in the dark night.
The depicted figure wore a black robe, with his head slightly turned, revealing very short dark hair that seemed freshly grown. The facial contours on his side profile were gentle, and his sickly pale-white skin contrasted with his dark brown eyes, which were not sunken enough.
Initially, 007 perceived nothing remarkable, but trusting Hidden Blade's knack for stirring trouble, he scrutinized it for more than ten seconds.
Beneath the lion's headgear, his brow furrowed as he whispered, "This doesn't seem like someone from any country in the Northern Continent."
Franca smiled playfully and self-deprecatingly.
"Don't you think he resembles us from before we transmigrated?"
007 froze, as if struck by lightning.
He studied the drawing repeatedly and fell silent for nearly 20 seconds before saying,
"Hidden Blade, do you understand what you're saying?"
Franca raised her head slightly and said in a deep voice, "I suspect he came from that country from our world.
"Muggle, I, and the others found signs of interaction between both worlds before!"
"When? What signs?" 007 interjected, fighting the urge to grab Hidden Blade's shoulder and shake her for every bit of information.
Franca chuckled.
"I'm not at liberty to answer you. I can only reveal it after discussing with Muggle and the others. There are many secrets involved. First, discreetly search for the person in the portrait. I

encountered him on the fourth level of the catacombs."
007 struggled to contain his impatience, resisting the temptation to handcuff Hidden Blade for details. Through gritted teeth, he said, "Can't you guys discuss it first before involving me?"
I was just considerate of your emotions, afraid that you'd lose control upon receiving so much information at one go... Franca let out a hollow laugh and replied,
"It's not time to meet Muggle and the others yet. I need to find him urgently, afraid he might leave Trier.
"Calm down, calm down. You can't hide your desire to kill me."
Franca smiled sheepishly, fading into the shadows.
Holding the portrait, 007 took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.
...
Feynapotter Kingdom, Port Santa, Solow Motel.
After breakfast, Lumian had just returned to the master bedroom when he sensed a sudden chill.
Simultaneously, a tarot card materialized on the desk.
The card depicted a knight running with a sword in hand.
Minor Arcana card, Knight of Swords!

Chapter 554: Favor

Lumian's gaze fixated on the Minor Arcana card before he noticed another person standing in front of the full-body mirror in the room.

The man sported a white shirt and a black vest, his face unusually pale and his brown hair tousled, suggesting he had just woken up.

For some inexplicable reason, Lumian sensed a conflicting demeanor in this person—elusive yet restrained. The brown eyes held an indescribable weight, akin to staring into an abyss.

"Knight of Swords?" Lumian inquired.

The man nodded subtly and responded, "Seven of Wands, how may I assist you?"

Surprised, Lumian questioned, "How do you know I'm the Seven of Wands?" Lumian hadn't disclosed his exact code name in the letter, merely stating he sought help from the Knight of Swords as guided by Madam Magician.

The Knight of Swords spoke slowly, as if holding back something.

"Ma'am Hermit informed me that the Seven of Wands, affiliated with Madam Magician, would soon arrive in Feynapotter, possibly in need of intel or assistance."

Madam Magician intentionally communicated with Ma'am Hermit about me, Lumian realized.

"I need your help locating two individuals in Port Santa and the surrounding seas. Try not to alert any factions."

"Be specific," the Knight of Swords replied, economical with his words.

Lumian shared Batna Comté and Nolfi's details, adding, "I'm not certain if they're still alive. They might have become corpses by now."

As he spoke, he handed two photo-like sketches to the Knight of Swords—a unique skill he'd acquired from Aurore's grimoires and his expertise in ritualistic magic. These images, directly replicated from his mind, bore an uncanny resemblance to photographs.

The ritualistic magic involved in creating such images demanded a suitable and secure target for prayer—a practice more common among official Beyonders who had orthodox gods to appeal to. Wild Beyonders rarely resorted to praying to dangerous entities for trivial matters. Being part of the Tarot Club, Lumian straddled both worlds, with the ability to seek aid from Mr. Fool or tap into Madam Magician's strength.

The Knight of Swords studied the photo-like sketches before affirming, "I'll help you find them as soon as possible."

There was no demand for payment or any immediate request,

prompting Lumian to sigh.
Organizations do have their advantages!
Internal assistance often translated into favors, subtly binding individuals to reciprocal obligations. Some preferred setting clear prices rather than owing favors,
but Lumian didn't entertain such thoughts. Securing the Knight of Swords' presence and help was already a considerable favor in itself.
He pondered for a moment and then inquired, "What mission do you have in Feynapotter? Do you need my assistance?"
The Knight of Swords paused briefly before responding, "The matter in Feynapotter is wrapping up, but I'll be heading to the Southern Continent soon. I might require your help there."
"Sure thing," Lumian agreed.
Intrigued, he asked, "Is Ma'am Hermit also overseeing matters in the Southern Continent?"
Wasn't she too busy?
Madam Magician had indicated that this Major Arcana card holder primarily dealt with sea-related affairs and a clandestine organization dedicated to the Hidden Sage, with little involvement in the Southern Continent.
The Knight of Swords replied in a subdued tone, "It's a personal matter, unrelated to Ma'am Hermit."
"Got it," Lumian acknowledged. Many of his past tasks weren't orchestrated by Madam Magician, and even his mission in Port Santa to track down April Fool's key member was considered personal business if it didn't involve the Celestial Worthy.
After a two-second pause, the Knight of Swords added, "Moreover, I'm only temporarily under Ma'am Hermit's command."
What does he mean by temporarily subordinate? Can one switch to other Major Arcana card holders in the future? Lumian wondered.
Without explanation, the Knight of Swords' form suddenly turned ethereal and disappeared.
Lumian, without activating his Spirit Vision, couldn't catch the departing figure in time.
It doesn't feel like teleportation or blending into the shadows...
After a quick assessment, he changed into a brownish-green short-sleeved shirt and loose brownish-yellow pants commonly seen in Port Santa.
Exiting the master bedroom, Lumian tossed the Lie earring to Lugano.
"Go to Valerio and get the new IDs. Remember the face you used when you last saw him."
"I remember it clearly." Lugano took the Lie earring.

As Lugano was about to proceed with his disguise, Lumian halted him.
"Find a secluded spot after leaving the room to use it. When you return, shift back to your original appearance before entering the motel."
Doesn't this mean I'll have this mystical item to myself for a while? Aren't you worried I might take off with it? It's not just unique; it's valuable! Lugano refrained from probing further. Following his employer's instructions, he took the Lie earring, a bag containing his disguise, and exited the room.
Observing Lugano's departure, Lumian picked up a golden straw hat and addressed Ludwig, "There's plenty of food in my bedroom. Stay put until I'm back."
"Sure thing," Ludwig agreed, seemingly eager.
Would someone exploit the absence of his guardians to attack him, the boy?
Lumian, passing by the sofa, casually placed the golden straw hat on Ludwig's head.
Simultaneously, he switched to a common round-rimmed felt hat and left the suite gradually.
He wasn't concerned about Ludwig being alone in the motel. In fact, those who might come into contact with the boy faced more significant risks.
Lumian adjusted his hat in the corridor and activated Shadow Transformation.
Swiftly, he transformed into a pure shadow, blending into the darkness at the base of the walls on both sides.
In the dark, veiled void, Lumian inhaled the scent of the gray amber perfume he had deliberately left on the Lie earring, using it to track Lugano.
His intent wasn't merely to determine whether the interpreter was problematic but to anticipate a potential attack.
With adventurer Louis Berry probing the sea prayer ritual and presenting himself as resolute and radical, it was likely the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village would swiftly react in a decisive manner, eliminating this outsider to dissuade others and factions from clandestinely stirring.
In this scenario, Lumian, Lugano, and Ludwig were at risk.
He specifically tasked Lugano to seek Valerio alone for the IDs, intending to see if Juan Oro and others had their eyes on his companions, seizing an opportunity to strike Lugano.
This strategy allowed Lumian to swiftly intervene if needed, rescuing Lugano while potentially neutralizing some Beyonders from the Fisheries Guild, showcasing the adventurer's strength

and instilling confidence in onlookers, compelling further attempts.
However, the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village might not act immediately. They might feign vulnerability, luring hidden adversaries to reveal themselves before eliminating them in one fell swoop.
Lumian shadowed Lugano to Valerio's underground casino, observing him pay the remaining 50 gold risot for two local IDs.
No attack... Could it be the Fisheries Guild is fishing, or did they fail to recognize Lugano after he used the Lie earring? Lumian pondered the potential reasons while traversing through the shadows.
Lugano hurriedly avoided lingering on the streets, well aware that his employer had incurred the wrath of the Fisheries Guild. He feared being ambushed by those unwilling to target Lumian, dragged into an alley, and subjected to a brutal beating.
Seeking refuge in a crevice between two buildings near Solow Motel, he swiftly reverted to his altered appearance. Removing the Lie earring, he switched into his customary black formal suit,
finally exhaling a sigh of relief. He turned onto Aquina Street and made his way back to the motel's entrance.
Several tramps lay dozing on both sides of the street, basking lazily in the sunlight.
Lumian was aware that unlike the severe tramp situation in the Loen Kingdom and the Intis Republic, Feynapotter's tramp issue was less acute due to fertile soil, ample pastures, and the Church's modified agricultural methods, resulting in surplus food production.
Here, food was notably cheaper, about 15 to 20% lower compared to Intis and other countries. Previously, before the Loen Kingdom began importing food from Feynapotter, the price of rye bread of the same weight was nearly twice as high.
Despite the abundance, bankrupt farmers, herders, and city dwellers ended up as tramps due to land acquisition, loan sharks, and other reasons. However, they received free food from various sources like the cathedral of Earth Mother, the Fertility Order, government departments, and charitable organizations, which although not filling, prevented starvation, allowing them to recuperate and find new opportunities.
As Lugano neared Solow Motel, Lumian, concealed in the shadows, sensed a disturbance.
Three tramps on the street abruptly stiffened, adjusting their postures unnaturally.
In an instant, they sprang to their feet like puppet marionettes,

drawing revolvers in an odd manner and aiming at Lugano from three different angles.
Bang! Bang! Bang!
Their white-eyed state left Lugano no room to evade as they pulled their triggers successively.

Chapter 555: Monster Illustrated

It wasn't until three tramps pointed revolvers at him that Lugano sprang into action.

As a seasoned bounty hunter, he had no time to discern where the assailants planned to shoot. He pushed off with strength in his feet, swiftly lunging to the side.

He dodged two bullets, but the third one was too close, altering his trajectory

—inevitably striking him.

In midair, Lugano did something unconventional.

Instead of curling up to shield vital spots, he extended his body, using his palm to shield his chest.

Bang!

The bullet connected with his right rib, unleashing a vivid spray of blood.

With a thud, Lugano landed on the street, rolling forward to evade subsequent shots.

In the midst of his lunge, Lumian's form materialized from the shadows by the roadside. He delivered a powerful punch to the tramp who had just fired.

With a resounding thud, the tramp's eyes rolled back, and he crumpled, unconscious.

Lumian returned to the shadows and swiftly moved behind another tramp. Before he could fire a second shot, Lumian punched him behind the ear.

As the tramp collapsed, Lugano skillfully evaded the second bullet fired by the remaining assailant.

In that tense moment, passersby and elderly women chatting on the street scattered, desperately seeking cover. The surroundings seemed eerily vacant.

Shadows danced as Lumian emerged from the darkness beside the last assailant. Extending his right palm, he seized the other's neck.

Almost simultaneously, the assailant's mouth opened naturally, emitting a slender black shadow.

An insect, as thick as a finger, with tentacle-like bristles floating on its body, lunged straight for Lumian's neck.

"Hmph!"

Two pale-white beams of light flickered in Lumian's nostrils. The slender, peculiar black insect lost its strength, gently descending into his raised left palm.

As anticipated... Lumian withdrew his right hand from the tramp's neck, unfazed.

The tramp's eyes returned to normal. Clutching his revolver, he

staggered backward, leaning against the wall before slumping to the ground in a daze.
Lumian paid him no heed. Utilizing the shadows, he swiftly approached an unconscious tramp, noticing a small, bloodless wound on the back of his cervical spine.
Another slender, bristle-covered black insect darted out, attempting escape. Lumian's hand, engulfed in crimson flames, seized it. After a few struggles, the insect emitted a cooked fragrance.
Subsequently, Lumian employed a similar method to handle the strange black insect emerging from another tramp's body.
During this procedure, Lugano half-squatted on the street, his left palm flickering with a clear light as he pressed it against the gunshot wound on his right rib.
The charred wound immediately contracted, ceasing to ooze blood.
Drawing a dagger, Lugano skillfully "picked" a yellow bullet from the wound with precision and efficacy.
With that accomplished, he generated a faint light in his left palm, pressing it against the wound.
The injury squirmed and swiftly fused, reducing to a fifth of its original size in no time.
Lugano had intentionally stretched, hoping the bullet would hit a spot he could conveniently handle!
As he retrieved a bandage to tend to the remaining wound, Lumian approached, extending his free right palm.
Understanding his employer's gesture, Lugano returned the Lie earring, expressing relief, "Fortunately, I'm a Doctor. As long as I'm not killed on the spot, gunshot wounds aren't a big deal."
Silently, Lumian donned the silver Lie earring. Leaning down, he pressed and swiped at Lugano's wound, transferring it to the back of his right hand.
Due to the disparity in location and Lugano's pre-treatment, the wound regressed into a small scrape—one akin to scraping against a rough wall.
"..." Lugano stared at the wound that didn't even require a bandage, falling into a prolonged silence.
Lumian smiled and remarked, "Why else do you think I let you carry Lie?"
"..." Lugano gaped, uncertain of what to say.
Surveying the area, Lumian instructed, "Take the three tramps' guns and wait for the police to arrive. Report that you were attacked.
"After giving your statement, if there's nothing else, take Ludwig to the Fertility Order's entrance and have them uphold justice and

maintain order in Port Santa."
"Alright, alright." Lugano hurriedly stood up.
Just as he took two steps toward the dazed tramp, realization struck. He turned around and blurted, "What about you? Where are you going?"
In his haste, he had forgotten to use honorifics.
Lumian simply chuckled, saying nothing.
I sent you to the Fertility Order to inform them of my intentions—to let them know!
Lumian proceeded towards Solow Motel, leaving crimson flames in his wake that incinerated the blood dripped by Lugano.
As he advanced, Lumian lowered his voice and asked, "Temiboros, do you recognize these insects?"
Termiboros remained silent.
Upon reaching the suite on the fifth floor, Lumian observed Ludwig eagerly awaiting him.
His heart stirred as he spread his left palm, revealing three black insects. Casually, he inquired, "Do you know what these are?"
Ludwig nodded obediently, speaking swiftly, "Batings Black Insect, a creature from Planet Heveen 3. Rich in various proteins and possessing high energy levels. They invade human bodies via the cervical spine, controlling their nervous systems to manipulate them to their advantage.
"These Batings Black Insects ceased evolving generations ago. While controlling the nervous system, the host's movements stiffen, and their eyes roll back.
"They seldom directly kill the host, but their larvae, once laid, absorb the host's energy, indirectly leading to their demise.
"In ancient times, many of their ancestors received boons. Though their descendants no longer possess these, their body structures adapted to the boon's power were inherited, eventually evolving into this special species with minor Beyonder-level powers.
"Consider it a special spirit world creature or a degenerated Beyonder creature."
After the long explanation, Ludwig gazed at Lumian longingly, asking, "That's all I have to say. Can I eat them now?"
You really know... You make it sound so real. The Batings Black Insect, Planet Heveen 3. What's happening... The alien planets Aurore mentioned? Lumian was taken aback.
Lumian wasn't surprised that Ludwig had the desire to consume the Batings Black Insects.
This guy could even gnaw on live rats!
The insects even emitted a rather pleasant fragrance after being roasted.

Lumian stared at Ludwig for a few seconds before handing over the three Batings Black Insects in his hand.
Ludwig didn't hide his delight. He swiftly devoured two of the roasted insects, relishing the explosion of juices in his mouth.
He half-closed his eyes, and an unusual fluctuation seemed to surge within him.
Lumian furrowed his brow in confusion but refrained from intervening.
Having used the Mystery Prying Glasses to discover that there appeared to be something beneath Ludwig's skin, coupled with Ludwig's daily behavior and the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom's stance, Lumian speculated that the boy was a monster in human guise, sealed by the Church to carry out tasks inconvenient for deploying clergymen.
Regarding the Reader pathway controlled by the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, it held various applications at the Body of Heart and Mind level. It was reasonable to assume why Ludwig's mind had suffered damage after being sealed, rendering him seemingly foolish.
After 20 to 30 seconds, Ludwig opened his eyes and rushed to the dining table. Grabbing a small steel table knife, he carefully placed the remaining Batings Black Insect on the tablecloth and skillfully cut it open, removing numerous black fascias.
Ludwig poured a glass of Manzan and arranged the fascia and the shell of the Batings Black Insect on the table, adding the black juice squeezed from the insect's body.
Lumian observed as the pale-golden liquor swiftly transformed into a dark-
red, almost black hue, emitting dense bubbles.
Once the bubbles subsided, Ludwig lifted the peculiar cocktail.
Only then did he remember Lumian's presence. Stammering, he asked, "Can I
—can I drink a little?"
A sealed Body of Heart and Mind indeed... Lumian smiled and sighed.
"Drink up."
Gulp! Gulp! Ludwig finished the small amount of dark-red nearly black liquor and expressed satisfaction to Lumian, saying, "After concocting the Batings Black Insect's bodily fluids, it can enhance the physique of those who drink it for the first time to a certain extent. It grants everyone the ability to paralyze primate creatures within two hours. Yes, it will only be effective through contact."
Th-this is turning the Batings Black Insect into something akin to charms? Moreover, it provides permanent effects and short-term

Beyonder powers... Amidst Lumian's surprise, he sensed that Ludwig had undergone significant changes.
He had never demonstrated the ability to prepare such food before!
Lumian didn't delve deeper and calmly remarked, "Take Lugano to the Fertility Order's entrance later and ensure he informs Noelia about the attack."
"Alright." In a good mood, Ludwig readily agreed.
...
Meanwhile at the port district—while Ludwig and Lugano arrived at the Fertility Order.
Wearing a golden straw hat, Lumian strolled towards the square dominated by an Ocean Waves statue. His attention focused on the grayish-black house adorned with the Port Santa Fisheries Guild's sign.
The four- or five-story castle-like ancient structure was rumored to be over a millennium old, having been destroyed and rebuilt centuries ago.
Lumian's eyes traced the intricate symbols on the wall, which included iron hooks and fishing nets. Adjusting his straw hat, he proceeded towards the Fisheries Guild.

Chapter 556: Violent Beating

The encampment of the Fertility Order in Port Santa sprawled along the city's edge, nestled near the suburbs. It claimed an entire street, complete with fields, orchards, and a variety of livestock, providing a self-sufficient haven for the nuns when they weren't on missions.

Lugano gripped Ludwig's hand and raised his eyes to the green vines entwining the cloister's spire, with the Sacred Emblem of Life at its center. A simple depiction of a baby amidst wheat ears, flowers, spring water, and other symbols. Turning to Noelia, he uttered, "I was attacked. Just wrapped up my statement at the police station."

Noelia, adorned with a black hat adorned with white patterns, blending religion and combat, furrowed her brow and inquired, "Where's Louis Berry?"

Rather than delving into the specifics of Lugano's assault, she honed in on the whereabouts of Louis Berry, the great adventurer.

Lugano shook his head and replied earnestly, "I don't know. He told me to come here after giving my statement and inform you that I was attacked."

Noelia's expression shifted to solemnity.

...

In the bustling port district, standing before the robust grayish-black edifice of the Fisheries Guild,

Lumian, now garbed in a white shirt, black vest, and brown pants, topped with a golden straw hat, casually strode to the building.

The two guards stationed here lacked guns, carrying only straight swords on their backs and daggers at their waists, blending in with the multitude of passersby.

"Who are you looking for?" Both guards extended their hands simultaneously, halting Lumian's advance.

Lumian couldn't "comprehend" Highlander. Without hesitation, he drew his revolver, pointed it towards the sky, and squeezed the trigger.

Amidst the gunshot's echo, he slipped between the two guards, entering the castle-like abode of the Fisheries Guild.

The guards exchanged uncertain glances but refrained from intervening.

One of them dashed towards the port's police station, while the other hurried into the grayish-black building, aiming to report to his superior and seek guidance.

Clutching his revolver, Lumian advanced at a measured pace. Beneath the puzzled stares of the staff, who hastily sidestepped, he

traversed the hall and ascended the stairs leading to the committee member's office.
Just as he approached the second floor, a figure appeared before him.
Bronze-hued skin, broad and sturdy physique, black hair, and blue eyes characterized the young man who had aided the Fisheries Guild's president, Juan Oro.
He was Fernandez Oro, the old man's grandson.
Fernandez glared at Lumian ascending step by step, gritting his teeth.
"How dare you intrude into the guild!"
Lumian paid him no heed. He maintained a steady pace, neither hastening nor slowing as he approached the entrance to the second floor.
Fernandez masked his expression, his back slightly arched, and his eyes appeared to radiate an ominous glow.
Suddenly, Lumian sensed a significant dimming of the ambient light.
Simultaneously, an intangible force descended from above, entwining around his feet, making him feel shorter and causing his body to sway. Fernandez, in contrast, seemed to grow taller, casting dense shadows that engulfed the corridor's meager light.
Thud!
Advancing, Fernandez swung his right fist towards Lumian's head.
A gusty wind permeated the space, propelling the fist with hammer-like force, guided by an unseen magnet.
Lumian gazed upward as something within him erupted, shattering the binding force.
His thighs swelled suddenly, and his loose brown pants constricted. He grew taller seemingly out of thin air, sleeves and pants tightening around bulging muscles.
Bang!
A left punch from Lumian met Fernandez's incoming fist in a thunderous collision, causing the stairs to quiver and sway.
Fernandez, forced back two steps, bore no fear but a hint of joy on his face.
Retreating, his eyes darkened with a touch of brilliance.
Raising his left hand, a dark-green light swiftly concentrated on his unusually rough fingertips.
The light transformed into a ray, silently hurtling towards Lumian, momentarily immobilized by the collision.
Fernandez chose close combat from the start, creating an opening for the ray, capable of disrupting the human structure and inducing swift internal injuries.

The dark-green danger ray matched the speed of light. Lumian, unable to dodge in advance, could only watch as it struck between his chest and abdomen.
Yet, the dark-green ray pierced through, striking only an illusion.
Leveraging the Ascetic's accumulated strength in clashing with Fernandez, Lumian had seized the chance to arch his back and stand in place like an arc, deftly evading potential sneak attacks.
In this intricate dance, he even employed the Niese Face, creating an illusion of himself still standing upright!
Gradually, the dark-green ray dissipated, vanishing around the corner of the stairs.
Suddenly, a crimson fire, nearly white-hot, erupted from Lumian's body.
Transformed into a fireball, he hurtled towards Fernandez, who had just regained his footing.
Fernandez's pupils constricted, seemingly challenged by the blaze.
Swiftly, he sidestepped, clenched his right hand into a fist, and yanked it down.
An invisible force tugged Lumian to the ground, but undeterred, he dispersed the flames, reappearing with feet firmly planted on the corridor floor.
Clang!
His massive form stomped heavily, causing the building to sway.
In a single stride, he stood before Fernandez, who had just risen.
His left fist, wreathed in crimson, nearly white flames, collided with Fernandez.
Without a moment to activate his superpowers, Fernandez raised his arms hastily to block.
Boom!
Flames erupted as Lumian's punch sent the young man flying, crashing into the partially open side office, demolishing the wooden desk.
Capitalizing on Fernandez's disorientation and pain, Lumian followed, rushing into the office and delivering another punch with his left fist.
Boom! Crimson flames, nearly white, illuminated the room as the punch explosively struck Fernandez's chest.
The flames were contained by an unseen force, preventing them from entirely obliterating Fernandez's chest. Instead, they crumpled, clouding the target's vision.
Expressionless, Lumian halted, gazing at the semi-conscious Fernandez. He raised his left hand.
A colossal crimson fireball, nearly white, condensed rapidly, poised to act as a Reaper.

In the next instant, the fireball shot forth, homing in on Fernandez.
Abruptly, it ascended, passing the target, and collided with the wall behind the desk.
Boom!
Blazing white and red flames burst through the glass window, the wall, and ignited outside the Fisheries Guild building, creating fiery clouds in the air.
Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt as though he entered a dark and profound void. Distant, resplendent stars blinked like vigilant eyes.
Once more, he confronted Juan Oro, an elderly man with deeply etched wrinkles.
At that moment, Noelia had rushed to the square where the statue of the waves stood, shouting towards the building with a fallen window frame,
"Stop!"
At the sound of the combat nun's voice, Lumian sighed with regret, swiveled his revolver, and holstered it under his armpit. Juan Oro and the surrounding void vanished.
A few minutes later, Juan Oro emerged from the grayish-black building of the Fisheries Guild with his walking stick. In a deep voice, he addressed Noelia, "He attacked Fernandez. You must apprehend him!"
Noelia cast a cold glance at the president of the Fisheries Guild and retorted, "Should I then invite Fernandez to the police station to assist in the investigation of the Aquina Street shooting?
"All of you, calm down and jointly maintain order in Port Santa. Otherwise, do you think the Church can't handle any of you?"
In the final words, the combat nun shifted her gaze to Lumian, issuing a warning as a gesture of fairness.
Juan Oro fell silent for a moment before stating, "I don't know anything about the Aquina Street shooting."
With that, he turned and limped back to the Fisheries Guild with his cane, where many employees rushed to assist him.
Observing this, Noelia led her combat team to "escort" Lumian away.
Once out of the port district, the combat nun instructed her team members to slow down and create some distance, walking alongside Lumian herself.
"You're making things difficult for us. Order, understand? Superficial order must be maintained." Noelia raised her hand, pinching both sides of her forehead. "Fortunately, you didn't really kill Fernandez. Otherwise, I would have had no choice but to carry

out the arrest."
Lumian chuckled and remarked, "If I truly wanted to kill Fernandez, he wouldn't have survived until your intervention or Juan Oro's rescue."
His words held undeniable truth.
Noelia was taken aback. After a few seconds of contemplation, she spoke, "Are you displaying your attitude, strength, and confidence for the onlookers? Simultaneously, do you wish for Juan Oro to misjudge your capabilities based on this encounter?"
Lumian remained silent. With a smile, he looked ahead and remarked, "Where did the former Governors of the Sea end up?"
Noelia fell silent for a moment before answering, "On the surface, they were dispatched to various locations. However, according to our observations, it takes at least four to five months, or no more than three years, for these Governors of the Sea to mysteriously vanish without a trace. There are often no signs of a struggle at the scene, and their families remain unharmed."
Did they return to the sea voluntarily? Lumian smiled and said, "See, didn't I gain something from dealing with Fernandez just now?"
The Church of Earth Mother now seemed more willing to share information.
Noelia wasn't upset. She smiled and added, "No one reveals all their cards from the start. Once your investigation reaches a certain point, we'll provide more."
Lumian stared at the azure sea beside him, contemplating for a moment.
"You haven't disclosed the intentions of your Earth Mother Church in this matter."
Noelia's eyes flickered. Suddenly, she raised her hand and pointed at the arguing pedestrians ahead, shouting, "Street brawls are prohibited!"
Before completing her sentence, she sprinted over with her team, leaving Lumian alone.
Lumian scoffed and slowly shook his head.
...
Late at night, as Lumian was about to retire for the night, he heard the deep and hoarse voice of the Knight of Swords, as if suppressing something.
"Clues to the whereabouts of the two targets have been found."

Chapter 557: Purpose

Already? Lumian hadn't anticipated the Knight of Swords making progress this swiftly—in just a day.

Trusting his gut, he turned, meeting his reflection in the full-length mirror.

There stood the disheveled, pallid-faced Knight of Swords, a sudden appearance.

"Just clues?" Lumian mused, distilling the essence of the other's words.

The Knight of Swords shot him a gaze, tightly reined, and uttered, "The day after hitting Port Santa, they visited Balançat Ship Rental, asking about renting a boat for fishing. Vanished since."

Those words sparked a fleeting thought in Lumian's mind.

Quite romantic. As expected of a three-halves Intisian and half-Feynapotterian duo. Opting for a fishing date!

If only Nolfi didn't carry the Maiden of the Sea's lineage and this wasn't Port Santa; then, romance might've been their motive. Regrettably, reality doesn't entertain "ifs." Lumian sighed, pondering Nolfi and Batna's true intentions.

Port Santa teemed with fishermen, yet not all owned boats. The lower-class ones either worked on vessels for a set pay or pooled funds to rent or buy. Balançat's profits came from these folks, not the tourists or middle-class sightseers. This wasn't a city known for tourism.

In Lumian's contemplation, the Knight of Swords pressed on, "Nolfi handled the price inquiry, but Batna cooperated without resistance."

Did Batna truly perceive it as a date? For Intisians, it holds allure. No wonder he didn't resist. Renting a boat for a sea excursion... Lumian pondered, his mind racing with possibilities. Was Nolfi planning to intercept the incoming Governor of the Sea during the sea prayer ritual or collide with their ship loaded with gunpowder? Perhaps she intended to replace them at a critical juncture? Lumian's thoughts whirred with conjectures.

Then, a sudden recollection jolted him.

Various sources mentioned a crucial detail about the sea prayer ritual: The final and pivotal part unfolded in a special sea area beyond the port. Details and the location were undisclosed to those who hadn't witnessed it.

A new hypothesis formed in Lumian's mind.

Nolfi's mother, a fleeing Maiden of the Sea, likely visited that special sea and might have shared pertinent information with her daughter.

Was Nolfi's motive for renting the boat to reach that unique sea area?
What lay there?
The core of the sea prayer ritual. Did this imply something, an entity, or power concealed in that zone? Was the ritual designed to harness something extraordinary?
Did Nolfi aim to seize the item and establish herself as the permanent Governor of the Sea? Or did she intend to obliterate it, terminating Port Santa's tradition of selecting the Governor and Maidens through the sea prayer ritual?
If obtaining the item were easy, the Fisheries Guild committee members would have done it long ago. Human nature tends to selfishness. Leaving a boon for the Maidens' children is improbable unless one stumbles upon a stroke of fortune and knows the right approach to secure, elude danger, and navigate the situation...
Destruction might indeed be the simpler route...
As his thoughts raced, Lumian looked up slightly.
Could April Fool's key members have orchestrated a prank to steal the item or its uniqueness?
Had they succeeded?
This was a pivotal question.
The Knight of Swords observed Lumian in silence, not disrupting his contemplation. He stood motionless, resembling a lifeless figure.
After a while, Lumian asked with curiosity, "How did you manage to trace Nolfi and Batna in just one day?"
The Knight of Swords, in a deep tone, responded, "Gathering information from the spirit world and conducting a field investigation. After their departure from the Balançat Ship Rental, all pertinent information was either concealed or eliminated, making it impossible to locate them again."
Isn't this the premise of certain divinations... Nolfi and Batna didn't take precautions against divination before visiting the ship rental company, but they did so afterward?
This doesn't add up. Either they never take precautions, or they do it consistently, unless they are both novices who only remember to guard against divination after inquiring about the boat's price...
Yes, a more plausible explanation is that ship rental falls within the fisheries and sea trade-related industries, deeply intertwined with the committee members of the Fisheries Guild. Nolfi and Batna, as outsiders, inquiring about the price of a ship rental attracted attention, and their identities were exposed, leading to their "disappearance"...

The note revealing that Nolfi is the child of the Maidens of the Sea might come from the owner or a shareholder of the Balançat Ship Rental? Lumian's thoughts gradually became clearer.
He gazed at the Knight of Swords, pondering how to request him to continue the investigation.
At that moment, the Knight of Swords took the initiative to say, "I'll delve deeper into the ship rental company."
"Thank you," Lumian expressed his gratitude sincerely.
Then, he witnessed the Knight of Swords's figure swiftly becoming transparent and vanishing.
Transformed into a soul-like entity? Wraith? Lumian discerned more details this time.
This led him to suspect that the Knight of Swords belonged to the temperance faction of the Church of The Fool. His subsequent journey to the Southern Continent was likely to deal with the indulgence faction of the Rose School of Thought.
Without hesitation, he shed his clothes, donned a faded cotton shirt, and reclined on the bed.
...
Late at night in Trier, Franca strolled beneath intermittently-lit street lamps, clad in a thick tweed shirt and pants that clung to her legs.
Even without makeup and deliberately concealing her appearance in the darkness and shadows, numerous inebriated individuals still approached her upon glimpsing her back or side profile, behaving like tiny flying insects circling under the gas street lamps on a summer's night.
Smack!
Franca's ponytail swayed slightly as she sent a particular drunkard flying with a sidekick.
The drunkard screamed and vomited on the ground.
Franca pursed her lips in disdain and muttered to herself, Pleasure sure brings trouble. It's manageable during the day, but some overconfident types try to flirt at night. And there's malice all around when I'm out. Even the hero who rescues a damsel in distress aims to strike up a conversation later...
However, those scoundrels came expecting joy and anticipation, only to receive a beating and the accompanying pain. Right, could this be considered a simplified version of pleasure causing affliction?
It was precisely because Franca wanted to experience this and potentially find an opportunity to digest the potion that she didn't sneak through the shadows and move undetected.
After a while, Franca slipped into the shadows and reached the

empty room where she had previously met 007.
Her associate had mentioned that he'd discovered information about the ancient tomb beside the Crazy Mushroom Cave on the fourth level of the catacombs through the Church's resources and municipal archives. However, it wasn't safe to disclose it in the telegram group, no matter how close their bonds were. Therefore, he compiled the details and left them at the designated spot for Franca to retrieve.
Franca conducted a brief search and found two folded sheets of thin paper.
She unfolded them and swiftly skimmed the content. As an Assassin, even in the dimmest environment, she could decipher the words:
"The ancient tomb where you found the Mirror World Fragment belongs to a noble family from the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire.
"Their last name is Tamara. I haven't located specific details about the members in that tomb, but I've stumbled upon something odd.
"Not only does the fourth level house Tamara family tombs, but there are also tombs on the third level, such as the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb and the Impartial Tomb. Why aren't they grouped together..."
Franca's gaze froze.
Isn't the Thorns and Shieldwall Tomb where Jenna completed her tearcatcher mission?
The mission they used as a pretext involved the Tamara family, and the tomb where they found the Mirror World Fragment belonged to them too!
Wasn't this an extraordinary coincidence?
Could it be a manifestation of mystical laws?
Franca collected herself and continued reading.
"...I can't access more detailed Tamara family information at my level. Figure something out yourself."
Hmm... Franca nodded, resolved to report the entire situation to Madam Judgment, seeking insights and information from the Tarot Club.
...
In the early morning, on Aquina Street in Port Santa.
In a house diagonally opposite Solow Motel, Lumian, his appearance transformed, stood by a window in a room. Clutching the new ID provided by Valerio, he surveyed the suite where he, Lugano, and Ludwig were lodged, as well as the street below.
Now, he aimed to play the role of an ordinary bounty hunter who had taken on a confidential assignment, diligently monitoring the adventurer, Louis Berry.

Given Louis's assertive conduct in recent days, it was likely that all the well-
informed individuals in Port Santa knew of this great adventurer's desire to investigate the sea prayer ritual. The probability was high that Bard and other pivotal members of April Fool's would be in tow!

Chapter 558: Tamara Family

Lumian savored the tang of fermented grape juice bought from a street vendor as he coolly surveyed the suite rented by the adventurer, Louis Berry. He occasionally cast a discerning eye over Aquina Street, on the lookout for any potential monitors.

A little over half an hour ago, Lumian had transformed his appearance and changed into a different outfit. He had seemingly "teleported" to a nearby street before returning to secure a suitable room.

Soon enough, Lumian spotted Lugano cautiously heading out to fetch an extra breakfast for Ludwig. A chuckle escaped him.

This guy was still spooked from yesterday's attack.

However, unless the members of the Fisheries Guild had succumbed to the corrupting influence of superpowers, losing control of their emotions and rational thinking, it was improbable for them to target Lugano, the interpreter and guide. Louis Berry's response the previous day had sent a clear message to everyone:

If you can't take me out directly, keep your sights off those around me. You might eliminate me, but I, Louis Berry, can do the same. There'll come a time when your Fisheries Guild's committee members, your kids, and descendants travel without protection or lack strength. Wanna guess if I'd dare to make a move or if I have the capability?

Either find an opportunity to bring me down with all you've got, or play nice!

Faced with such a resolute "answer," the rational committee members of the Fisheries Guild would know what to do. Louis Berry, the adventurer, wasn't bound by official rules like a Beyonder or a cop. Expecting him not to involve family in the game was unrealistic.

Moreover, considering his recent behavior and the circulating rumors, he was a daring adventurer, reminiscent of Gehrman Sparrow. Known for his aggression, madness, and coldness, there were no limits to what such a person might do.

Of course, Lumian wasn't letting his guard down entirely. Lugano would either have Ludwig's "company" in the future, or he'd be under Lumian's watchful eye at all times. After all, beyond the Fisheries Guild, many individuals in Port Santa were secretly plotting to exploit this opportunity for their own gain. Disguised as Fisheries Guild members, they could attack the interpreter and godson of the adventurer Louis Berry, intensifying the conflict and stirring up trouble prematurely.

Ignoring conspiracies at this level would be unacceptable for a

Conspirer.
After Lugano returned to his suite on the fifth floor of Solow Motel with a heap of breakfast, Lumian purposefully avoided looking at the high-backed chair, seemingly adorned with a golden straw hat, positioned strategically at the dining table. He turned on his heel and exited the room, ready to explore the surroundings.
Stepping into the corridor, Lumian immediately spotted a burly man standing near the staircase, barely reaching 1.7 meters in height.
The man, with brown hair, brown eyes, and rugged skin, held a distinctive long mouth cigarette between his lips, fixing his gaze on Lumian.
In Highlander, the man inquired, "Who sent you here to keep an eye on Louis Berry?"
Lumian couldn't help but let out a soft chuckle.
"Are you not here to monitor Louis Berry yourself?
"I didn't even inquire about your sender. Why the sudden curiosity?"
He responded in flawless Highlander as well.
The man, with the long mouth cigarette dangling, contemplated for a moment before nodding in agreement, making way for the stairs.
Lumian strolled past him, descending the staircase step by step.
As he departed, the man's gaze took on a gradually ominous edge.
He raised his left hand, delicately twisting the special long mouth cigarette.
Taking a deep breath, he exhaled into the cigarette, and in silence, a slender steel needle shot forth from the charred tobacco, aimed directly at Lumian's back, mere two meters away.
It was a blow dart, originating from certain tribes in the primitive forests of the Southern Continent. Typically, blow darts were one to two meters long, making them unsuitable for concealment or sneak attacks. However, bounty hunters, followers of the God of Steam and Machinery with strong hands, modified them into a more portable version—only slightly longer than regular cigarettes.
While this modification increased portability and its concealed nature, it sacrificed some power and limited its range to a mere four to five meters. When paired with specially crafted arrows carrying anesthetic and lethal toxins, it remained a favored tool among bounty hunters on both Northern and Southern Continents.
The man had concealed the blow dart within the long mouth cigarette, intending to lull the target and strike when the

opportune moment arrived.
His objective: to subdue Lumian and extract information about the identity of his employer.
The steel needle flashed past, but Lumian seemed to have anticipated the attack. Just as the man blew air to propel the needle, Lumian swiftly bent forward, arched his spine, and dodged the blow dart in an almost inhuman contortion.
With a soft poof, the steel needle embedded itself into the wooden staircase.
In the next moment, the assailant's eyes widened as Lumian, in a display of flexibility surpassing human limits, swung a boxing glove.
Bang!
He fainted.
Swiftly recovering from his contorted evasion, Lumian bent down, scooped up the unconscious assailant, and dragged him into his rented room.
Taking advantage of the assailant's unconscious state, Lumian administered a dose of truth serum and calculated the time for him to regain consciousness.
Examining the unremarkable, ordinary face of his assailant, Lumian calmly listened to the panicked shout.
"I just wanted to incapacitate you and find a spot to interrogate you about your employer!
"The poison on the arrow is just an anesthetic!"
Squatting in front of the man, Lumian smiled and responded, "Now, let me ask you, who's your employer?"
"It's Juan Oro!" the brown-haired, brown-eyed man blurted out.
Lumian chuckled and probed further, "Is that so?"
"Yes, no, it's actually someone else..." At this point, horror overcame the man, and he fell silent.
Lumian prompted him patiently.
"Who is it?"
After struggling for a few seconds, the man involuntarily spoke,
"Rubió Paco."
Rubió... *Why is he keeping tabs on me?* Does he seek to gain from the adventurer's activities? Is that why he didn't approach me discreetly to share information? Lumian nodded subtly and straightened up.
"Your breath stinks. Remember to brush your teeth more often."
"..." The assailant looked perplexed, unable to fathom why the conversation had taken this turn. Nonetheless, he replied half-heartedly, "I'm not a fan of brushing my teeth."
Lumian shook his head in disdain, uninterested in the blow dart

as a trophy. Leaving the room, he left a parting message: "Make sure to lock the door behind me."
...
In Trier, within Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Franca and Jenna's rented apartment.
They had already received Madam Judgment's response via Rabbit Chasel.
Before departing, Rabbit Chasel, adorned with a miniature top hat, shrunken gold-rimmed glasses, and a diminutive black trench coat, made an unusual request.
"Can I use a custom-made revolver as compensation for delivering the next five letters?"
Jenna's mouth hung open, momentarily taken aback.
"Sure."
She questioned, "Why can't you conjure one yourself?"
Similar to your top hat, glasses, and trench coat.
"They have no practical use, but I hope the revolver does. The bullets need to be custom-made too," Rabbit Chasel explained earnestly.
Jenna blinked and acquiesced.
Once the messenger departed, Franca commented with a peculiar expression,
"Why does it feel like it has shifted from pursuing knowledge to pursuing strength?"
Jenna wanted to defend Rabbit Chasel but struggled to find a compelling excuse. Instead, she cursed, "It's not necessarily a bad thing. It might even aid me in future battles!
"Moreover, the stronger the messenger, the safer the letter deliveries."
Franca, lacking a messenger, suddenly felt a twinge of envy. Without delay, she unfolded Madam Judgment's reply.
"The Tamara family, one of the five noble families from the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire, held a hereditary duke aristocratic title, akin to the Amon you're familiar with, albeit slightly lower in status.
"In the era when the gods roamed the land, families capable of becoming great nobles undoubtedly possessed angelic powers. According to the information, the Tamara family had existed for many years before Alista Tudor became the Blood Emperor. They were renowned nobles from the previous empire.
"They had the coat of arms changed once and two internal divisions. This is why Tamara was buried on different levels of the catacombs at different times.
"Initially, their coat of arms consisted of thorns, a shieldwall, and

vertical swords. Later, it became an open door, with the vertical sword acting as the crack.
"This represents a significant change in the Tamara family. It shifted from being dominated by the Justiciar pathway to being dominated by the Apprentice pathway. However, no corresponding historical information has appeared for the time being.
"A small number of members of the Tamara family, who adhere to the Judgment pathway, have survived to this day and are secretly active.
"The other Tamara group had established a close connection with the Demoness family during the Tudor Empire's era. During the Fifth Epoch, a secret organization known as the Theosophy Order emerged. It had Demoness figures and originated from Tamara's Apprentice pathway. There's reason to believe that they are still cooperating.
"This Tamara group has been estranged from the other one for many years, refusing to acknowledge each other.
"The Tamaras of the Judgment pathway also experienced a division. The exact situation is unknown..."
Upon reading this, Franca and Jenna shared the same thought.
The Tamara family is indeed connected to the Demonesses!
They continued reading the contents of the letter.
"The person who led you to the Tamara family's tomb and discovered the Mirror World Fragment is likely targeting that special mirror world and the Demoness Sect. Don't worry for the time being. Just be vigilant against coincidences, theft, and scams around you..."
...
In the ensuing days, Lumian, along with Lugano and Ludwig, remained unharmed.
Port Santa seemed to settle back into a semblance of normalcy. Those secretly observing displayed no indications of advancing further.
Just as Lumian contemplated taking further actions to elucidate all details before the sea prayer ritual in early November, the Knight of Swords brought fresh information regarding Nolfi and Batna.
His face maintaining a pale-white hue, he spoke to Lumian, "I've identified a suspect involved in the kidnapping of the two targets. Should I handle it alone, or shall we proceed together?"
Lumian took a moment to consider before responding, "Together."

Chapter 559: Top-Notch Collaborator

After making his decision, Lumian had a chance to inquire, "Who's the suspect?"

"Lato Guiaro," the Knight of Swords announced.

Lumian recognized this individual. He was also a committee member of the Fisheries Guild. Not only did he own shares in three large fishing boats and the Port Santa Fisheries Company, but he was also involved in shipbuilding, ice production, and other industries. Someone in his family had already married a Maiden of the Sea over a hundred years ago.

Lumian asked thoughtfully, "What's Lato Guiaro's connection to Balançat Ship Rental?"

"He's a creditor of the company and has arranged employment for many relatives there," the Knight of Swords replied succinctly.

"It all adds up." Lumian nodded in agreement and paused to reflect. "Let's convene at the crossroads of Saint Lana Street and Golden Wheat Street. How about meeting in three minutes?"

He had never set foot in Lato Guiaro's extended family estate, so he lacked the corresponding spirit world coordinates. His only teleportation option was Saint Lana Street, relatively close to their target. He needed to utilize Spirit World Traversal discreetly to evade any surveillance.

"Sure." The Knight of Swords dissolved into transparency and disappeared instantly.

Lumian spent two minutes hydrating, donning a vest and a straw hat. Only then did the faint glow of the black mark on his right shoulder illuminate.

In an instant, his figure vanished from the shrouded room.

At the crossroads of Saint Lana Street and Golden Wheat Street, Lumian materialized from a concealed corner. The Knight of Swords, now sporting disheveled brown hair, a switched flaxen-colored shirt, and a dark brown vest, stood at the fringe of the crimson moonlight. His pallid face and oppressive eyes hinted at an underlying transformation, as if he could shed his human guise at any moment, revealing a monstrous form fueled by pent-up desires.

While others might miss these subtleties, Lumian, being an Ascetic, possessed a heightened sensitivity to such situations.

The temperance faction, indeed... Lumian mused at the Knight of Swords's appearance, entertaining a whimsical thought.

Bro, ever considered embracing Inevitability? As an Alms Monk or an Ascetic, you'd spare yourself from enduring so much!

Of course, Lumian merely toyed with the idea and wouldn't

actually propose it. Without the right strokes of luck, the boon of an evil god could gradually corrupt Beyonders within the potion system, eventually transforming them into humanoid monsters aligned with the evil deity. Nevertheless, his musings hinted at the potential synergy between specific Sequences of the boon system and potion system.

"Let's proceed." As the Knight of Swords remained silent, Lumian took the lead and spoke.

The Knight of Swords nodded, and they followed the shadows along the street, turning into Golden Wheat Street at a measured pace, heading north.

Soon, they reached a five-story building resembling a small castle.

Observing the illuminated windows and grayish-blue outer walls, the Knight of Swords pointed at a specific glass pane, noting,

"That's Lato's bedroom. He and his wife sleep in separate rooms."

The gathered intelligence is impressively detailed... Lumian acknowledged silently and inquired, "What's your plan?"

"Sneak in and take control of the target," the Knight of Swords responded succinctly.

Isn't that a bit too straightforward and crude? The Guiaro family likely employs more than just ordinary Beyonders. Some members may have gained powers through the sea prayer ritual... Lumian recalled the unique characteristics of a Wraith and assessed his capabilities. With one hand in his pocket, he casually remarked, "Okay."

With those words, his form dissolved into a shadow, seamlessly merging with the darkness.

Beside him, the Knight of Swords had already vanished.

Utilizing the shadows cast on the building's outer wall, Lumian deftly infiltrated Lato Guiaro's room.

In an instant, his target came into view.

A middle-aged man, with slightly curly black hair and dark brown eyes, adorned in a dark-blue cotton robe, greeted Lumian's sight. His long face featured a neatly trimmed thick beard.

Lato Guiaro's expression morphed into one of fear, and his body froze. He stumbled toward the shadow concealing Lumian.

In the reflection within each eye of the Fisheries Guild committee member, Lumian spotted the pale-faced Knight of Swords, clad in a dark brown vest and flaxen-colored shirt, with disheveled brown hair!

Observing Lato Guiaro losing control of his body, unable to utter a sound, Lumian stepped out of the shadow, returning to his original form.

An oppressive heaviness enveloped the air around him, akin to the

weight of seawater.
Apart from this, nothing seemed amiss.
With a controlled step, Lumian approached Lato Guiaro, a sensation akin to moving through a swamp.
He refrained from resorting to the direct use of the Spell of Harrumph. Firstly, the other party seemed powerless and could be managed through alternative means, saving his spiritual energy. Secondly, Lumian hesitated due to uncertainty about whether the Spell of Harrumph would incapacitate both of them, given the forceful possession of Lato Guiaro by the Knight of Swords.
Retrieving a bottle of sedative from the Bliss Society, Lumian unscrewed the cap and brought it to Lato Guiaro's nose.
Fanning the opening with his hand to hasten the gas's flow, after about ten seconds, the committee member of the Fisheries Guild closed his eyes and slumped into unconsciousness.
Remarkably, he remained standing, not collapsing to the ground.
The Tarot Club's Minor Arcana card holder, the Knight of Swords, maintained absolute control over Lato Guiaro's body.
This is even simpler than employing teleportation and the Spell of Harrumph... I've faced numerous Beyonders before, but never have I subdued one without laying a hand on them. I strolled up casually, administering the sedative. A Wraith truly stands as an exceptional ally, capable of harmonizing with any Sequence of any pathway... Yes, a Wraith remains impervious to anesthetic gasses. The Bliss Society's sedative had no effect on him. As Lumian observed the noiseless resolution, he almost felt as if he hadn't partaken in the skirmish at all.
He returned the Bliss Society sedative to his concealed pocket and retrieved a canister of truth serum. Seizing the moment, he administered nearly a third of it to Lato Guiaro. Sensing that the sedative's impact might be short-lived on Beyonders with unknown traits like Lato Guiaro, he hastened to complete his preparations before the target regained consciousness.
Within 20 to 30 seconds, Lato Guiaro's eyes fluttered open.
First, he encountered Louis Berry, the adventurer in the golden straw hat, adorned with a faint smile. Subsequently, he discovered himself seated on a chair at some indeterminate moment, facing the divan in the bedroom.
Lato attempted to scream, but his vocal cords rebelled, rendering him motionless.
"Have you grasped your situation?" Lumian reclined on the sofa, placing his right foot on his left knee.
He spoke in Intisian.
Fear etched across Lato's face, rendering him unable to nod or

respond.
While he possessed certain abilities, Lato was certain they wouldn't suffice against the adventurer Louis Berry. They would likely result in a renewed coma or a swift lightning strike.
"What do you want?" Lato suddenly inquired.
He, too, knew Intisian.
Attempting to raise his hand in surprise to touch his neck, he found himself immobilized.
Lato Guiaro lapsed into silence.
With a smile, Lumian responded, "I have a few questions for you. Answer them satisfactorily, and I might consider letting you live until tomorrow to assist me in spreading the word about this affair."
Lato remained silent for a moment before consenting, "What do you want to know?"
Lumian casually shook his right ankle.
"Are Nolfi and Batna with you?"
"Yes," Lato responded with a strong inclination to divulge information. "They're locked up in the basement. They're still alive. I just want to use them."
"For what?" Lumian inquired, intrigued.
Lato's lips trembled as he explained, "I intend to use them to lead you to the location of the sea sacrificial ritual and guide you to rent a boat there."
"So, you're the one who wrote that note..." Lumian exclaimed in realization. "How do you plan to guide me?"
Lato struggled to articulate his actions, but his mouth moved faster than his thoughts.
"I want you to discover that Nolfi and the Batna intend to rent a boat and head out to sea. Then, I'll arrange for them to seize an opportunity to escape and relay something to you, letting you know the significance of the sea area."
"And then?" Lumian inquired with curiosity.
Lato sealed his lips shut but eventually spoke.
"What they will tell you is the truth, but they are unaware of one thing: "Never engage a Child of the Sea in a sea battle! Juan Oro awaits you in that sea region, ready to bury you entirely!"
So, the Fisheries Guild planted a deceptive trail through the clue about Nolfi, posing as a turncoat to lure me into a trap and eliminate me... If I hadn't swiftly revealed my intent to investigate the sea prayer ritual, exposing Nolfi and Batna to exploitation, they might already be sleeping with the fishes... The skirmish against Lugano was crafted to deceive me... As Lumian's thoughts raced, he heard Lato express confusion, "You haven't even started your

investigation. How did you find me? You merely sent your interpreter to inquire about Nolfi and the others' whereabouts. There was no follow-up..."
Lumian's smile held a cryptic undertone as he disclosed, "Do you think I'm here alone to investigate the sea prayer ritual?
"I represent the will of many. Numerous comrades lurk in the shadows of Port Santa."
Lato felt a chill course through his stiffened body, lending credence to Lumian's words.
Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his chin.
"Where does your power come from?"
Lato's throat constricted as he answered, "From the sea. Each sea prayer ritual grants us strength.
"Unfortunately, the ritual failed last year. We received no replenishment for two years, and everyone weakened to varying degrees. Otherwise, Juan Oro would have finished you long ago. He would have cast your lifeless form into Wave Square, a stark warning to those who cross us!"
Similar to a boon? Theoretically, even without replenishment, a boon's power will gradually wane... Lumian pondered for a moment and remarked,
"The sea prayer ritual is a large-scale boon-seeking ritual, with the Governor of the Sea as the primary sacrifice?"
Lato contemplated for a moment before responding,"He serves as both sacrifice and host. Juan Oro and we act as assistant hosts.
"The sea prayer ritual is essentially a marriage to the sea and appeasing it. The boon is a byproduct."
"Marriage to the sea?" Lumian suddenly found his imagination lacking.

Chapter 560: Traces

Lato rarely divulged details about the sea prayer ritual. He spoke with a weighty demeanor, "Yes, the Governor of the Sea ties the knot with the sea, quelling its violence and bringing peace. They truly become the spouse of the sea, commanding authority over this stretch of water.

"As the assistant and deputy hosts, we also gain varying degrees of in Port Santa receive some boons, although they are limited in number."

So, the Governor of the Sea is synonymous with Husband of the Sea. The assistant and deputy hosts are like close friends or family busy assisting at a wedding, naturally earning gratitude. Those with the sea bloodline are akin to children attending a wedding, typically gaining some candy... Lumian attempted to comprehend Lato Guiaro's description of the sea prayer ritual by combining reality and wedding traditions in novels.

Intrigued, he inquired, "Does the Governor of the Sea engage in those acts with the sea?"

Aren't weddings supposed to conclude with newlyweds consummating their marriage?

"Of course!" Lato affirmed, "After the wedding, the sea will bind itself to the four Maidens of the Sea. Through their union with the Governor of the Sea, the first child of each Maiden of the Sea is a noble with a pure sea bloodline, possessing the strongest Beyonder powers.

"Why four and not one Maiden of the Sea? It's because individual humans can't endure the vastness, expansiveness, weight, and transcendence of the sea. Enough partners are needed to share the burden."

The more I listen, the more ominous it becomes... Marrying a Maiden of the Sea is akin to marrying a remnant of the sea's power. It's no wonder they're highly valued, and their destinies change. The only challenge is acknowledging and loving their wife's first child. Lumian contemplated for a moment and remarked, "And the Governor of the Sea can withstand the passion of the sea?"

And it was four at a time.

Lato, devoid of pity or sympathy, stated, "One of the two most crucial purposes of the vigil ritual is to utilize the house and some of the sea spawn concealed within it to transform the Governor of the Sea's body, enabling them to withstand the violent and unrestrained sea.

"That's why the Governor of the Sea can only serve for a year. Even

with the physical transformation, the power acquisition, and the Beyonder enhancement, they won't endure much longer."
Consumable. The husband of the sea is a consumable... Lumian sighed inwardly and queried, "Then why would the Governor of the Sea return to the sea after leaving office?"
"No one knows the exact reason, but there's a certain conjecture. Juan Oro believes that the sea doesn't allow those who were once its husband to start a new life. And I believe that the modifications of the vigil ritual, the intrusion of spousal intercourse, and the influence of maritime authority make the Governor of the Sea more and more like a sea creature and less human. Eventually, he will inevitably return to the sea that gives him peace and comfort."
Lato felt that his deduction was correct.
What exactly is the sea you're referring to? Is it a natural spirit or a creature beyond, controlling the sea? Lumian replayed Lato Guiaro's answers in his mind before asking, "Sea spawn? Like the wrinkled monsters that can disguise themselves as devils, and the long black insects that control humans by burrowing into their necks?"
"Yes," Lato responded, yearning for a cigarette but unable to move his hands. "We, the Children of the Sea, are spawn of the sea. One of our duties is guiding certain sea spawn from the depths to settle on land using our Beyonder powers, helping them reproduce."
However, Ludwig mentioned that the Batings Black Insects originate from another planet, not some sea spawn... Lumian didn't rush to ask about the Children of the Sea's Beyonder powers; instead, he focused on the details of the sea prayer ritual.
"What's the other vital purpose of the vigil?"
Lato's expression hinted: "Don't you understand what weddings are about?"
"Well, there's the exchange of rings for marriage. And the vigil ritual modifies the Governor of the Sea's body, attaching a unique trait to a fixed golden ring, matching it to the sea bride's identity."
A unique golden ring... Lumian perked up and said, "And then?"
During last year's April Fool's prank, fringe members received orders to acquire a gold ring from Torres and conceal it within the lamb sacrifice's stomach!
"Then, following the completion of the other rituals, the Governor of the Sea will take the golden ring and cast it directly into the sea before the ship. He will utter in a unique language from the depths,
'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion!'
"If the sea consents to this union, gentle waves will stir, transforming into pure white foam petals that will shower over

the four Maidens of the Sea.
"The returned ring carries symbolic weight, signifying authority over the waters surrounding Port Santa[1]."
Just the waters encompassing Port Santa? From the indications, it seems it's not the true sea, but rather something that affects this specific area of the waters... Lumian paused briefly before speaking, "How do you express 'We espouse thee, O sea...' in that peculiar language?"
Lato Guiaro contemplated for a moment before emitting a chattering sound.
Under the influence of the Language Comprehension charms, Lumian failed to grasp its meaning. He concluded it wasn't part of the Northern Continent's languages.
Simultaneously, he observed the Knight of Swords in Lato's eyes slightly shaking his head.
If the Knight of Swords truly belongs to the temperance faction that parted ways from the Rose School of Thought to align with the Church of The Fool, he should possess knowledge of the Southern Continent's language. Additionally, with his high Sequence and extensive tenure as a Beyonder, he must have encountered most supernatural tongues. Does this imply it's not from the language family of the Southern Continent, let alone ancient Hermes, Dragonese, Elvish, or other mystical languages? Lumian regarded Lato Guiaro with an intrigued grin.
"Are you certain those words translate to 'We espouse thee, O sea...'?"
Lato hesitated briefly before explaining, "Probably. This is a language passed down from ancient times, existing since the sea prayer ritual. There are only a few sentences..."
He's not sure... They hadn't systematically mastered the language, only capable of uttering two or three sentences based on the legacy... Lumian sensed there might be more to it than Lato's description; there was no denial if the true meaning was akin to "Open Sesame."
The folks from the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village might have been akin to the individuals Aurore and Franca spoke of. They employed a peculiar language, its true meaning eluding them as they substituted it with their own interpretation.
As Lumian pondered, his expression remained unchanged.
"Does the Governor of the Sea safeguard the ring after he acquires the special trait?"
"No," Lato responded, shaking his head. "In addition to the Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea, and sailors in charge of controlling the ship, there are four pure-blooded Children of the

Sea acting as deputy hosts. They guide the Governor and the Maidens through the ritual stages, teaching the unique call to marriage. The golden ring is held by one of the deputy hosts and only handed over to the Governor when needed."
The Governor of the Sea doesn't have a chance to switch ritual rings... Suppressing his anxiety, Lumian continued at a measured pace, "Did the sea prayer ritual fail last year?"
Lato initially seemed taken aback, but then relief crossed his face.
"Did the imposter seek your help?"
"Yes, for some reason, the sea prayer ritual failed. The sea's rage claimed the lives of the Governor of the Sea and the four Children of the Sea serving as deputy hosts. Only the Maidens of the Sea and some sailors survived."
The four deputy hosts are dead? Just as Lumian uncovered clues about April Fool's, he sensed the link had been abruptly severed.
The individuals with the best chance of substituting the ceremonial ring had all perished in the unsuccessful sea prayer ritual!
Lumian thought for a moment before inquiring, "What happened to the surviving Maidens of the Sea and sailors?"
"They're still alive, but under strict surveillance." Realizing that the failure to last year's sea prayer ritual was exposed, Lato, not dwelling on the survivors' details, continued, "We arranged marriages for the four Maidens of the Sea who lack actual sea powers with ordinary family members. Though it won't bring about a Beyonder-level change, it has its benefits.
"The sailors, from Milo Village, received some benefits from Juan Oro but are restricted from leaving Milo Village until this year's sea prayer ritual succeeds."
Shifting gears, Lumian asked, "Did the sailors transport the sacrificial lambs and other offerings for the marriage to the sea to the deck?"
"Yes." Lato nodded. "Sailors handle such cumbersome and laborious tasks."
Within the ranks of sailors, one among Bard, Mad Lady, or Ultraman had sneaked in. If the other side held a stronger Beyonder power or a mystical item from the Marauder pathway, they could snatch the genuine ceremonial ring during the exchange, swapping it with a counterfeit... It wouldn't be a surprise that the Marauder pathway, influenced by the Celestial Worthy, has key April Fool's members wielding matching strengths or artifacts... Lumian swiftly suspected this.
He turned to Lato Guiaro, keeping his tone composed.
"Tell me about the four Maidens of the Sea and the survivors from

last year among the sailors."
Lato recounted the details from memory.
Having absorbed the specifics about the potential targets, Lumian inquired further, "Were all participants in the sea sacrificial part thoroughly checked?"
"Absolutely. No unauthorized items allowed onboard to maintain the ritual's integrity. And before the ship reaches its destination, Juan Oro will vigilantly oversee using his powers," Lato elaborated.
As anticipated, Lumian nodded subtly.
"What powers does Juan Oro wield?"

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1. Adapted from the Marriage of the Sea ceremony of the Venice Doge set to be hanged. ↩

Chapter 561: Language of the Stars

Lato Guiaro struggled to keep silent, but the words burst out of him.

After a long internal battle, he finally responded, "He's the most powerful among us. Before joining the Fisheries Guild committee, he served as a deputy host on the sea sacrifice ship a whopping 11 times. He gained numerous boons and established a solid connection with the sea.

"He can fly. If he's not afraid of losing lifespan, he can temporarily take control of these waters on behalf of the Governor of the Sea. He possesses other special abilities, though they're rarely revealed. We're not entirely sure either. What we do know is that the failure of last year's sea prayer ritual significantly weakened him."

Lato paused and couldn't resist adding, "First and foremost, we are astronomers. Our expertise lies in observing the stars' transformations and calculating their patterns.

"Keep in mind that the annual sea prayer ritual doesn't have a fixed date. It could happen any day during the first week of November. This is because, to enter that special area that communicates with the sea, the stars need to be in specific positions to open the corresponding passageway.

"The date of a similar phenomenon varies from year to year. Astronomers with sufficient knowledge must predict it in advance through observation and calculation."

The idea of Fisheries Guild committee members being astronomers seems comical and absurd... Lumian didn't interrupt Lato Guiaro's narrative.

The self-proclaimed astronomer continued his explanation.

"Secondly, we are humans who worship the sea and the cosmos. We can receive revelations and guidance of fate from the changes in tides, the waves of the sea, and the trajectories of the stars, avoiding danger and making the right choices. Many times, we refer to such revelations and guidance as the Language of the Stars."

The Language of the Stars... sounds pretty dangerous. How do you know it's not something risky like Termiboros or Ludwig winking at you? Lumian resisted the urge to shake his head and sighed inwardly.

"Furthermore, we are descendants of the sea and the cosmos, serving as clergymen who offer sacrifices to them.

"We can manipulate the power of the land to completely immobilize the target or make them float.

"We can emit rays from the cosmos, causing damage to the

enemy's body structure and weakening them. Without the corresponding superpowers to treat them, they will face an irreversible and agonizing death.
"We can also create a powerful magnetic effect. Combined with the power of the land, we can generate a half-real illusion. We call it the Cosmic Void." Lato's expression gradually turned fanatical.
From a mysticism perspective, the Beyonder characteristics of the Children of the Sea involve the land and the cosmos. According to Aurore's knowledge, it encompasses gravity, radiation, and electromagnetism. Furthermore, due to gravity and electromagnetism, they also possess some illusionary and spatial abilities. Lumian, rephrasing Lato Guiaro's words for easier comprehension, couldn't help but criticize inwardly, Hey, you're the Children of the Sea, not the Children of the Stars. Why don't I see many sea-related powers...
Lato took a deep breath and continued, "We are also the navigators of the sea and the cosmos. We can find the right path under any circumstances, guided by the performance of the sea and the stars. We can use this power to help others.
"Without our guidance, ships can't enter that special water even on the correct date. That's why Nolfi insisted on returning to Port Santa before setting off. Although she knew the coordinates and route of the sea sacrificial land from her mother, she would never have reached it if she didn't set off from Port Santa.
"The spawn that come to land from the seabed also rely on our abilities in this area to survive the fog, vortex, and storms without losing their way in the sea route or being swallowed by darkness."
Navigators... Lumian suddenly recalled the strange fish he had encountered on the Flying Bird, the Mutated Bannerfish, who could control the waves.
They were also known as Death Navigators!
"Have you heard of the strange fish known as Death Navigators?" Lumian interrupted Lato Guiaro's account.
Lato hesitated for a moment before responding, "Yes, they're also spawn of the sea. We all suspect that they were transformed from the Governors of the Sea who returned to the sea."
Transformed from the Governors of the Sea? Lumian raised his eyebrows.
Lato swallowed and explained, "They should still be fused with the sea, so future generations will be born, but their strength is inferior to theirs.
"In the past, they only roamed those waters. In recent years, for some reason, they occasionally swam out and returned. After the sea prayer ritual failed last year, this situation became even more

frequent."
Did the failure of the ritual cause the Death Navigators to go out more frequently? Did the Death Navigators lure sailors to those special waters? Were they ultimately devoured by the sea? Lumian's mind raced with questions, but he knew that Lato Guiaro couldn't answer them.
Lato returned to the main topic.
"We can still manipulate the waves to a certain extent and influence the tides, but we can't compare to Juan Oro, much less the Governor of the Sea."
That's more like a Child of the Sea? That's why they think it's easier to bury me in the sea? Lumian pondered as he inquired about a few more details. He then lowered his right foot from his left knee and slowly stood up.
Nodding at the Knight of Swords in Lato's eyes, Lumian said to Lato Guiaro, "Last request, release Nolfi and Batna."
With that, Lumian walked to the bedroom window.
Simultaneously, the Knight of Swords, who had possessed Lato Guiaro, vanished. The committee member of the Fisheries Guild regained control of his body.
As Lumian left, Lato Guiaro couldn't help but express his confusion, fear, and a hint of uncontrollable emotion, "I thought you'd kill me once you got the information..."
Otherwise, wouldn't it expose the fact that you have many hidden helpers, the secret of a faction behind you, and the uniqueness of your helpers?
Lumian didn't look back and continued forward.
On the way, he pressed down on his golden straw hat and smiled.
"To you, this might be important, but not to me."
Just as Lato Guiaro was about to say something, he saw the body of the adventurer, Louis Berry, suddenly turn black and thin, transforming into a shadow that disappeared from the crimson moonlight's reach.
After staring at the darkness for a while, Lato adjusted the collar of his robe and left the master bedroom. He personally headed to the basement to release Nolfi and Batna.
Opposite the building where his family resided, beneath a row of verdant trees,
Lumian leaned leisurely against the black gas streetlamp pole, gazing at the glass windows illuminated by the light.
The disheveled, pale-faced Knight of Swords materialized behind him and asked in a deep voice, "Are you really not going to kill him?"
Lumian chuckled and said, "If we kill him, who's going to inform

Juan Oro that I have powerful helpers and the support of a powerful faction lurking in the shadows?"
He couldn't just toss tarot cards at Lato Guiaro's corpse, could he?
Furthermore, the problem lay in the fact that no one knew that the adventurer, Louis Berry, was a Minor Arcana cardholder of the Tarot Club.
Upon hearing Lumian's response, the Knight of Swords pondered for a moment before vanishing into the darkness.
Before long, Batna emerged from the house where Lato Guiaro's extended family resided, clutching his rapier and revolver.
Upon seeing Lumian, they looked a little ashamed and approached him with slow steps.
"Thank you for saving us," Nolfi, adorable in a blouse and brown pants, expressed her sincere gratitude.
Batna said, "I'm well aware of Nolfi's intentions and haven't been deceived by her. I sympathize with the tragic fate of these sea spawn and hope to help her end all of this."
Lumian looked at Nolfi.
"What kind of tragic end will it lead to?"
The committee members of the Fisheries Guild seemed quite pleased.
Nolfi fell silent for a moment before saying, "All Maidens of the Sea and Children of the Sea eventually transform into a lizard-like humanoid monster. Perhaps earlier, perhaps later, my mother passed away because she was attacked by assassins hired by the Fisheries Guild and wanted to die as a human. Not only did she refuse treatment, but she also inflicted some damage on herself."
In that case, the humanoid lizard at Rubió Paco's house is a common sight in families around Port Santa. Why the need for secrecy? Lumian turned to Batna with a smile, asking, "Did you know Nolfi would transform into a humanoid lizard?"
"Yes." Batna expressed that he didn't mind.
At that moment, Nolfi inquired, "Then do you know what a humanoid lizard looks like?"
As she spoke, the rather attractive female adventurer's eyes widened. Shimmering illusory scales appeared on her body, and her skin transformed into that of a snake.
Batna jumped in fright, taking a step back involuntarily.
Lumian continued to ask Nolfi, "Why didn't you rent a boat at a nearby port and find a sailor to sail it over? Why choose a ship rental company in Port Santa?"
Nolfi undid the phantom scales, reverting to her original appearance, frustration and embarrassment evident in her voice.
"In Port Santa, people often rent boats for fishing and sightseeing.

This should be a very ordinary thing..."
Lumian sighed helplessly.
"Did you know that last year's sea prayer ritual failed? The Fisheries Guild will be on high alert this year, investigating all unstable factors. Besides, the sea prayer ritual is only a few days away. It's inevitable to start paying attention to those who rent boats to go out to sea."
Nolfi and Batna remained silent, resembling two students.
After a moment, Nolfi asked in surprise and suspicion, "Did the sea prayer ritual fail last year?"
Lumian didn't answer immediately. He thought for a moment and said,
"You want to end the sea prayer ritual with just the two of you? What gave you the confidence?"
Nolfi pursed her lips and stated, "As long as I can enter those waters and find the palace, I have a way to destroy it and end everything."
"Palace?" Lumian's eyebrows twitched.
Nolfi nodded.
"When my mother was possessed by the sea, she saw a strange palace through her spirituality and the connection between them. It's located at the bottom of the sea. It's the palace of the sea!"

Chapter 562: Changed Plans

Palace? Lumian hadn't anticipated gaining information that Lato Guiaro lacked from Nolfi.

After a brief pause, he inquired, "What's the palace like?"

Was it an ancient relic or the abode of some natural spirit?

Could the sea prayer ritual be tapping into the palace's inner power?

Nolfi shook her head.

"My mother couldn't give a detailed description. She just mentioned that the palace is unlike any structure on land. It boasts a peculiar design, with smooth curves and a reflective metallic sheen. Overall, it's silver-gray."

Lumian envisioned the palace based on Nolfi's account, though lacking specifics, he could only conjure an approximate image.

He grinned and remarked, "If that's truly the sea palace, do you honestly believe you two can bring it down?

"If you struggle against Lato Guiaro and his crew, how do you plan to breach the sea spawn's defenses? How will you escape the sea's fury?"

Nolfi paused for a moment before responding, "I have my ways."

She didn't elaborate on the method.

Could a Child of the Sea, likely below Sequence 7 in strength, truly destroy the sea palace? An entity capable of unleashing violent storms across the entire sea... Lumian pondered, forming a sudden hypothesis.

Was Nolfi's confidence rooted in collaboration with others? Had she not returned to Port Santa without adequate preparations?

As Lumian's mind raced, he shifted his gaze toward Batna.

Batna Comté, who had inadvertently distanced himself from Nolfi by two to three steps, had just re-sheathed his rapier and concealed his revolver.

Sensing Lumian's scrutiny, he grinned sheepishly and explained, "I'm here for support and to command the ship. You might not know, but I served as a second mate for a while before becoming an adventurer."

In other words, he implied: "I'm not sure about Nolfi's plan either. Whether she succeeds or not doesn't concern me much. I've fulfilled my duty as a lover by providing some assistance."

I can tell that you come from a good background based on your refined attire and grooming... Initially, I thought you ran away from home, enchanted by Gehrman Sparrow's adventure story, and went to sea to become an adventurer. Now, it seems your family recommended you to be a second mate to gain work

experience. After a while, you resigned and chose the path of an adventurer... Lumian was unsure how to assess Batna's romanticism. Glancing at him, he commented, "Do you realize how dangerous this situation is?"
Batna cleared his throat and replied, "I thought the Children of the Seas wouldn't be too formidable. Nolfi and I have sparred before."
Lumian eyed Batna for a couple of seconds before redirecting his gaze to Nolfi.
"What are your plans moving forward?"
Without directly inquiring about hidden collaborators, Lumian circumvented the question, aiming to lower Nolfi's guard and uncover any hints from her responses.
Nolfi pursed her lips and said, "We've been exposed and targeted by the Fisheries Guild. Our original plan is no longer viable. I intend to lay low until the sea prayer ritual concludes."
"Why not just leave?" Batna interjected, expressing surprise on Lumian's "behalf."
He believed that once Nolfi's motives and identity were revealed, she would promptly abandon this operation and devise an alternative plan for a future sea prayer ritual.
Nolfi fell silent for a moment before revealing, "If the sea prayer ritual succeeds, and I'm still in Port Santa, being a Child of the Sea with a relatively pure bloodline, I should be able to gain a certain boon..."
She paused, briefly gazing at the ground.
"Although it might hasten my transformation into a humanoid lizard, it can also enhance my strength..."
A subtle sorrow lingered in her words.
Batna stared blankly, his mouth agape, but no words escaped him.
Lumian raised his hand, adjusting the golden straw hat on his head. Using a well-known line from the Adventurer series, he remarked, "This is both a blessing and a curse."
As Louis Berry prepared to depart, Nolfi once again expressed her sincere gratitude.
"I don't know how to express my gratitude. If you need any help, feel free to come to me."
"You can find me too," Batna chimed in.
Caught between staying with Nolfi or leaving Port Santa, he hesitated.
Lumian's gaze swept across their faces, and he suddenly smiled.
"Coincidentally, I have something for you two to do."
Nolfi was taken aback but nodded gently.
"Just shoot."
...

Having bid farewell to Nolfi and Batna, Lumian stealthily returned to Solow Motel from the shadows.
Emerging from the darkness in the corner of the master bedroom, he found the Knight of Swords standing by the curtains, silently observing him under the crimson moonlight.
Why do you always appear like a scene from a ghost story... Is this a Wraith trait or a manifestation of the potion's influence? Lumian critiqued, expressing gratitude,
"Thank you for your assistance."
The Knight of Swords remained silent. He looked at Lumian and inquired, "After controlling Lato Guiaro, it seems you've altered your original plan?"
Lumian chuckled.
"You're quite perceptive, but I changed my mind perhaps a little earlier or later than the moment you specified."
He responded with a hint of a charlatan's demeanor and elaborated with a smile, "How can an original plan be executed without any changes? That's not the mark of a Conspirer but an omnipotent and omniscient one.
"During the planning process, one must adjust their approach based on feedback, new information, and changes in the situation, while ensuring the true motive remains intact."
Hence, concealing his true motives was crucial.
It was akin to the many paths between the starting point and the end, with often only one true conclusion. This point was the most vulnerable to blockages and ambushes.
The Knight of Swords listened quietly and then silently vanished by the window.
Lumian allowed himself to relax, washed up, and retired to bed, sleeping soundly until six in the morning.
Following breakfast provided by the motel, he directed Lugano to take Ludwig to the streets for some snacks.
Observing their departure through the closed door, Lumian returned to the master bedroom, where the curtains still hung. In the dimness, he pulled out the armchair from the desk and settled in.
After an indeterminate period, he suddenly noticed glimmers in the depths of the darkness.
He felt himself suspended in midair, devoid of solid ground beneath his feet or a backrest behind him.
Lumian maintained a stoic expression as he gazed into the profound void with a cosmos-like backdrop. From a distance, Juan Oro, the president of the Fisheries Guild, approached, attired in a formal suit and wielding a walking stick.

Lumian looked at the old man in silence, displaying no surprise, as if anticipating Juan Oro's arrival.
As the distance closed to a certain extent, Juan Oro's wrinkles trembled as he uttered in Intisian, "Milo Village was once obliterated, along with the sea spawn that ventured onto the land. Yet, we stand here today.
"As long as the sea endures, as long as the cosmos persists, as long as Port Santa remains a forbidden land for death, we can resurface from the sea's depths, regardless of the blows we endure or the loss of our descendants. We can rebuild Milo Village and initiate the sea prayer ritual anew.
"This is attested by the clergyman of the Earth Mother Church, their combat ascetics, and their nuns.
"If we, the Children of the Sea, are truly pushed to the edge of a precipice, we possess the courage and determination to drag the enemy into the abyss. This is because we firmly believe in our indestructible spirit and the ability to rebuild our village, preventing its extinction."
You share all this with me to convey that the Fisheries Guild and Milo Village's sea spawn are unafraid of threats, possessing both the ability and courage to face powerful enemies. Furthermore, you suggest that the corresponding legacies will endure, resurfacing from the sea in the future. It's akin to a warning, cautioning me not to go too far. Otherwise, they won't hesitate to engage in an internecine conflict... Lumian comprehended Juan Oro's veiled message and chose not to respond. He silently observed the old man, waiting for him to continue.
Juan Oro's azure eyes reflected the image of the black-haired, green-eyed adventurer Louis Berry. In a resonant voice, he questioned, "What do you and the forces supporting you desire? What is your aim? We won't tolerate the disruption of the sea prayer ritual, nor will we abandon the foundations laid in Port Santa."
Realizing that adventurer Louis Berry is not only formidable but also backed by a faction, they must perceive me as a tough adversary. If they were to confront me head-on, they might find it challenging to prevail. Hence, he's here to negotiate, seeking to exchange concessions for my withdrawal? Is he attempting to assert his bottom line and strength to dissuade me from rash actions, leaving both sides with a way out? Lumian showed no surprise. He glanced around and remarked, "Why isn't there a chair? I prefer discussing matters while seated."
After a brief silence from Juan Oro, the armchair reappeared behind Lumian, and he resumed his original posture.

Lumian calmly gazed at Juan Oro, the Fisheries Guild president, and stated, "Would you believe me if I told you I never intended to disrupt the sea prayer ritual?"
"Never intended to disrupt the sea prayer ritual..." Juan Oro repeated, his deep wrinkles furrowing.
Lumian continued, "As long as you're willing to spare the innocent, like the fake Governor of the Sea, cooperation isn't out of the question."
"Cooperation?" Juan Oro couldn't conceal his astonishment. He scrutinized the adventurer who had forcefully intervened in the Fisheries Guild's affairs upon arriving at Port Santa. Lumian had stormed the Governor of the Sea's residence, blown up the Fisheries Guild's main building, and nearly killed his grandson. He wondered if his hearing had slowed down like the other elders.
A smile gradually spread across Lumian's face. He leaned back in his chair and snapped his fingers, igniting a crimson flame.
"Yes, cooperation."

Chapter 563: Another Attempt

Upon learning the intricacies of Louis Berry's collaboration and his unwavering commitment, Juan Oro found himself questioning the reliability of his own ears once again.

It wasn't that the other party's demands were outrageous or absurd, making it sound like some kind of jest. On the contrary, the Fisheries Guild could fulfill his desires with minimal effort, without requiring a substantial payment.

This went beyond Juan Oro's initial expectations.

Prior to meeting Louis Berry, he had mentally prepared himself for potential ruthless "extortion." After all, considering the ease with which the other party subdued Lato Guiaro and displayed strength against the Fisheries Guild, Oro had anticipated a tougher negotiation. Surprisingly, Louis Berry proved to be more amenable to discussion than Oro had envisioned.

This led Juan Oro to contemplate whether there might be some deception at play. He wondered if, in the future, Berry would abruptly turn against him during their collaboration, breaking the promises made.

Lumian observed the wrinkled old man silently, refraining from clarifying his intentions. Explaining might expose his true motives, and the timing wasn't right yet.

After careful consideration, Juan Oro let out a sigh of age.

"We can accede to your request."

"However, throughout our collaboration, we will remain vigilant and formulate contingency plans."

Lumian smiled, rising from the suspended armchair in the void. He extended his right hand to Juan Oro.

"Pleasure working with you."

Juan Oro shook his hand and remarked, "You're not as crazy as you seem..."

Lumian pondered for a moment and smirked.

"Of course, I've always been a clever, rational, and polite adventurer."

Juan Oro wasn't in the mood for idle chatter. He nodded at Louis Berry and stated, "Given your preference for discretion in our collaboration, I should depart now. Otherwise, my visit might become known to others."

Lumian took a moment to contemplate before responding, "I'll dispatch my concealed companion to Milo Village tomorrow night. Ensure the surviving sailors from last year's ritual are brought to your main building in advance and kept under control."

"Agreed." Juan Oro didn't object; this was one of the terms they had

agreed upon.
As the cane-wielding old man prepared to leave, Lumian called out thoughtfully,
"I'm a man of my word. I promised Giorgia I wouldn't disclose the details of the commission to anyone.
"But I have a question for you. Have any Children of the Sea from the Paco family gone missing recently or not been seen for an extended period?"
He hinted that his inquiry was linked to the Paco family's commission.
Juan Oro's expression darkened as he contemplated for more than ten seconds.
"The Paco family's Children of the Sea have made appearances recently.
"At first, I thought something had happened to Rubió's mother, Martha, that we shouldn't know about. Yet, it turns out she's still fine, just severely injured."
No missing Children of the Sea from the Paco family? *Where did the humanoid lizard come from?* Lumian was alarmed.
His initial thought was that the Paco family might be involved with other Children of the Sea. His second thought was that one of the Paco family's Children of the Sea might have been replaced.
Is the impostor parading around with the original's face, while the real individual had transformed into a humanoid lizard, meeting their demise at the hands of the great adventurer?
Lumian couldn't help but associate the substitute and the frequent appearances of the person in question with a Sequence name: Faceless!
It aligned with the Lie earring's Sequence—the previous Sequence of Marionettist Loki!
Could it be that after Loki's resurrection, he infiltrated Port Santa and clandestinely replaced a key member of the Paco family? Was his goal to set a trap for me and execute something during the sea prayer ritual, continuing what he had left incomplete the previous year?
With these thoughts swirling, Lumian couldn't help but experience a blend of excitement and fear.
However, upon further consideration, he dismissed the notion.
If Loki had genuinely substituted an essential member of the Paco family, there wouldn't be any humanoid lizard sightings. He could have discreetly resolved the issue and erased all traces, avoiding such an obvious loophole!
Moreover, Rubió Paco wasn't the sole Child of the Sea in the Paco family. Martha, as a Maiden of the Sea, also wielded the residual

power of the sea. How could they struggle against a humanoid lizard whose strength hadn't reached the Mid-Sequence? Why would they take the risk of exposing the secret and hiring an external adventurer, Louis Berry, to handle the situation?
With Lumian's comprehension of the sea prayer ritual and sea spawn deepening, it left him even more bewildered about the Paco family's previous decisions. He believed that crucial information was concealed within.
He turned to Juan Oro, organizing his thoughts.
"Are descendants of the same Maidens of the Sea prohibited from attacking each other?"
"There's no such restriction." Juan Oro dismissed Lumian's speculation.
Lumian deliberately mused aloud, "Then why did the Paco family intentionally hire an outsider like me for the commission instead of utilizing their own Beyonders?"
Juan Oro maintained his serious expression.
"It's for the same reason I hired someone to monitor Paco's house. That's why I sent the Little Devil to interrogate you. That's why I needed to meet Martha."
You call that wrinkled, old man-like monster "Little Devil"? Lumian nodded gently and asked, "The Paco family must be harboring a significant secret."
He refrained from delving deeper and watched as Juan Oro turned away, walking off with his cane.
Soon, the Cosmic Void around him dissipated, and he "returned" to the draped master bedroom of the suite, seated in the armchair before the desk.
Lumian smiled, pivoted, grasped the curtain, and drew it open.
The morning sun flooded in, casting a radiant glow.
...
The next night, within the ancestral house of the Oro family in Milo Village, a structure only one floor shorter than the residence of the Governor of the Sea.
The building had undergone numerous renovations, showcasing a fusion of antiquated and modern architecture. Blackened gray stone walls stood alongside concrete pillars, and beneath the seaweed-covered roof lay red-
ringed tiles.
The door to the first-floor lounge had been shut, leaving only an elderly man with a black cane—Juan Oro—and his cherished grandson—Fernandez Oro—
alongside eight unconscious villagers of Milo Village sprawled on the ground.

Suddenly, a shadow flickered in a corner of the room, and a figure materialized.
Standing just over 1.7 meters tall, the figure possessed an ordinary face and sported a brownish-green short-sleeved shirt, loose brownish-yellow pants, strapless leather shoes with vents, and a short circular felt hat.
"Who are you?" Juan Oro inquired in Intisian.
As one of Port Santa's strongest sea merchants, he had sailed numerous times between the ages of 30 and 50. It was only natural for him to comprehend Intisian.
The man responded fluently in Highlander, "I'm Louis Berry's companion. You can call me Charname."
It doesn't seem like the spirit-type Beyonder Lato encountered... Louis Berry has more than one companion lurking in the shadows... Juan Oro rejoiced that he had chosen negotiation first.
With these thoughts racing through his mind, he glanced at Fernandez, whose face remained pale, and understood that he wasn't entirely pleased.
It was common for young lads to be calculating about who suffered and who benefited, often forgetting their most essential motives.
"You can start questioning them," Juan Oro instructed the man known as Charname. "Over the past year, we've employed various methods to determine if they're lying or not. We've even exploited the uniqueness of other sea spawn. All the results indicate that they've told the complete truth and concealed nothing. The failure of the sea prayer ritual has nothing to do with them."
Charname's lips curved into a smile as he replied, "How would I know if I don't give it a shot myself?"
Approaching the unconscious sailors, he retrieved a dagger and stabbed their fingertips one by one, smearing the corresponding blood on various spots on the back of his hand.
Amidst the pain, the sailors began to awaken one after another.
In front of them, Charname produced a mirror and smiled.
"Your blood will reveal if you're lying and if you're the genuine person. If anyone deceives me, their blood will burn on the mirror, and they'll face the same fate.
"Alright, answer them one by one."
As Charname spoke, he calmly transferred the blood from the back of his hand to the mirror, a strange sight as it seemed to seep into the glass.
The sailors glanced at Juan Oro, realizing this was another investigation into the cause of the sea prayer ritual's failure last year. Skilfully, they recounted their experiences, leaving no details

omitted.
After hearing their accounts, Charname asked thoughtfully, "Were Iru and Salah responsible for transporting the lamb sacrifices?"
"Yes," all the sailors replied in unison.
Charname pressed on, "Did they both perish during the sea prayer ritual?"
The surviving sailors nodded, confirming that their two companions had been thrown overboard in the tidal wave of the failed ritual, never to surface again.
Turning to Juan Oro, Charname inquired, "Do you have any belongings from Iru and Salah? Clothes they've worn many times, toothbrushes not discarded, and the like.
"I want to try summoning their spirits. Although most of their spirits would have dissipated over the past year and can't remember effective information, the state of their spirits can reveal certain things, such as deep resentment and hatred."
Juan Oro shook his head.
"We attempted it after the sea prayer ritual. We couldn't summon their spirits. Those consumed by the raging sea would have their spirits devoured as well."
Charname chuckled and suggested, "Let's give it another shot. There's nothing to lose by trying."
Juan Oro pondered for a moment and agreed. He immediately instructed Fernandez to retrieve Iru's extracted tooth and Salah's clothes, previously used for spirit channeling.
Then, they observed as Charname set up the altar and initiated a summoning ritual.
"I!
"I summon in my name:
"The sailor of Port Santa's Milo Village, a man named Iru Adela, the owner of this tooth..."
A gust of wind blew, and the altar's candle flame took on a dark-green hue.
A blurry figure quickly materialized.
Success? He actually succeeded? Fernandez's pupils dilated as he gazed above the candle flame.
The figure vaguely resembled Iru, but it showed no signs of drowning; its skin was pale-white and swollen. Instead, its face was covered in blood, and there was an evident wound on its forehead.
The specter's eyes brimmed with pain and hatred.

Chapter 564: Individual Roles

Looking at the specter suspected to be Iru, Juan Oro's expression shifted.

Back then, even though they had missed the optimal time for spirit channeling, they still managed to learn about the deaths on the first day and found items that could accurately pinpoint the target. Utilizing the Little Devil's ability, they completed the summoning, but none of the deceased spirits appeared. This led them to believe that the human spirits that angered the sea would be devoured. No further attempts were made.

Nearly a year later, the summoning had actually succeeded!

Moreover, it appeared that Iru hadn't drowned at sea but had been shot.

This was entirely different from the backlash caused by the failure of the sea prayer ritual!

Charname used Hermes to inquire about the spirit suspected to be Iru, but the target was already in a daze and couldn't recall anything. Even his appearance had become blurry, assimilated by the environment.

Charname concluded the ritual and used Salah's clothes, worn over many years, to summon the spirit of the other deceased.

This time, nothing happened.

Charname refrained from further attempts. He extinguished the candle's flame and dispelled the wall of spirituality. In Highlander, he addressed Juan Oro, "The problem has become clearer."

Juan Oro didn't respond. Instead, he turned to his grandson, Fernandez.

"Take them out and send them home. Instruct each of them."

"Alright." Although Fernandez yearned to hear Charname's conjecture and understand the subsequent events, he didn't dare disobey his grandfather's orders. He hurriedly led the surviving sailors out of the lounge and closed the door.

After a few moments, Juan Oro shifted his gaze to Charname, whose features didn't stand out.

"Are you suggesting that the Iru who perished during the sea prayer ritual was an imposter?"

Charname asked with a smirk, "Why do you think the fake Iru is really dead? The others might have been swallowed by the sea, but not him."

Disregarding the miraculous resurrection, nobody present could prove that the fake Iru had indeed fallen into the sea.

Observing Juan Oro's silence, Charname pressed on, "The real Iru should have been assassinated by those saboteurs days or even

weeks before the sea prayer ritual. No, he was more likely to have been kidnapped, killed by a gun a period after the sea prayer ritual completed; after all, the living cannot have their spirit channeled. Later, someone disguised themselves as him and lived in Milo Village for a period. Without arousing suspicion, they boarded the Governor of the Sea's wedding ship as a sailor.
"Right, is Iru the kind with no living elders, no spouse, no kids, and not residing with siblings?"
Juan Oro's eyes narrowed as he spoke, "More or less. Their grandmother passed away over a decade ago. His parents, Children of the Sea, established a separate family. After reaching adulthood, they lost control of their powers, turning into pure sea spawn. We had to send them back to the sea."
"As expected, they picked the sailor with the least difficult disguise," Charname remarked with a sigh.
Juan Oro frowned and said, "Yet, everyone boarding the ship undergoes a routine inspection by another sea spawn to confirm authenticity."
Charname chuckled.
"As you said, it's a routine inspection, and in this world, many disguises require specific methods or deeper identification to uncover."
Juan Oro nodded solemnly.
Charname kindly suggested with a hint of flaunting, "Next time, it might be wise to draw blood from everyone boarding the ship and compare it to their closest relatives. It could reveal their true bloodline."
"That's an idea," Juan Oro tersely acknowledged.
Over the centuries, the sea prayer ritual had encountered no issues, so they hadn't considered refining the details.
Juan Oro inquired, "What do those who disrupted the ritual want?"
"We're not certain either," Charname shrugged, glancing towards the curtained window that led to the Governor of the Sea's residence.
Juan Oro sensed a hint in Charname's allusion to something Louis Berry had mentioned earlier. He subtly nodded and added, "When this year's sea prayer ritual succeeds, we'll release Miguel and allow him to live in Torres. By then, the failure of last year's ritual won't remain a secretive burden. There's no need for us to harm Miguel."
"Miguel?" Charname inquired thoughtfully.
"He's the false Governor of the Sea. He used to work for the Fisheries Company, and his lineage traces back to Milo Village," Juan Oro explained succinctly.

Charname diverted his gaze, a faint smile gracing his lips.
"He's had his year of indulgence. Fear may linger, but everything comes with a price."
The companion of the great adventurer paused, curiosity lighting up his eyes.
"Did your ancestor come from the depths of the sea, or did ordinary fishermen suddenly gain inspiration and enlightenment, mastering the art of pleasing the sea and gaining its favor?" he inquired.
Juan Oro took a moment of silence before responding, "We don't know. Both possibilities are equally plausible. Milo Village was once eradicated by the Earth Mother Church. Many legacies were severed, and we're left clueless about our ancestors' origins.
"On a personal note, I lean towards the second theory. We're different from typical sea spawn. The children we bear initially resemble humans. It's only as they absorb more of the sea's power that they transform into humanoid lizards. Additionally, while our strength weakens, theirs does not."
Charname nodded in agreement.
"I'm inclined to think the second scenario is more likely too."
He then asked, "Have all traces of Milo Village's ancestors truly been erased? Is there no evidence left?"
Juan Oro studied Charname for a moment before revealing, "There's some residual evidence in the underground chamber of the Governor of the Sea's residence, but it's just symbols and patterns. They're meaningless and indecipherable.
"If you want to see them, wait until the vigil ritual. But aren't you concerned about the risk of exposing our collaboration by going to the Governor of the Sea's residence now?"
"Fair point." After obtaining other details, Charname abruptly receded into the shadows in the corner and vanished.
Juan Oro watched as the great adventurer's companion disappeared and released a slow sigh.
He sensed a storm brewing around Port Santa.
...
In the master bedroom of the fifth-floor suite at Solow Motel.
Emerging from the shadows, Charname adorned the silver Lie earring behind his left ear. His eyes swiftly transformed, becoming as clear as a lake, and his flaxen-tinted hair cascaded over his shoulders.
Franca, still radiating astonishing charm despite her male attire, tossed the earring back to Lumian. She retrieved a black rubber band from her pocket and tied her long hair into a high ponytail.
"I've discovered traces of Bard!" the Demoness of Pleasure

exclaimed with joy.
"Why Bard and not the other two?" Lumian sat in an armchair in front of the desk, tightly drawn curtains behind him.
Deliberately returning to Trier and bringing Franca to Port Santa for her assistance, Lumian believed himself inferior to the Demoness of Pleasure in divination and spirit channeling. Rather than wasting the truth serum, he sought Franca's direct help. Additionally, he wanted Franca to assume the guise of his other identity, completely separating "him" from the adventurer Louis Berry. This would enable him to deceive those secretly monitoring him and potentially execute future deceptions.
Franca shared her findings from the spirit channeling today and the completed conversation.
"The fake Iru must first possess powers akin to a Faceless's, followed by adept thieving skills. Long ago, I Know Someone mentioned that Bard is a Sequence 6 Prometheus of the Marauder pathway. It's highly likely he's even stronger now.
"If others hadn't confirmed that Loki wasn't involved in last year's sea prayer ritual prank, at least not openly, he would have been the most suitable to impersonate Iru. Now, the probability of Iru being Bard is higher.
"As a Mid-Sequence Marauder Beyonder, perhaps he possesses an item similar to Lie. Maybe he prayed to that Celestial Worthy, undergoing a change in physique and appearance. Additionally, he could be imbued with mystical anti-divination and anti-prophecy traits. Marauder is one of the three pathways most easily influenced by Celestial Worthy."
Lumian listened quietly, and a smile gradually formed on his face.
"Bard's role and purpose in last year's ritual are essentially clear.
"He disguised himself as a sailor, boarded the ship, stole the genuine ceremonial ring, and replaced it with a fake one. Then, he willingly leaped into the sea, feigning his death to make his escape!"
Lumian paused briefly before continuing, "The question now is, what roles did Mad Lady and Ultraman play in this matter? So far, their presence doesn't seem to affect the final failure of the sea prayer ritual."
Franca pursed her lips and paced back and forth.
"Mad Lady might handle receiving and communication. For instance, after Bard jumped into the sea, she could 'teleport' over and whisk him away to prevent him from being consumed by the tumultuous sea. Only a Traveler possesses such an ability.
"Ultraman is likely responsible for providing information about the sea prayer ritual and devising the corresponding plan. But that

can't be all. He probably has other roles..."
Lumian leaned back in his chair, stroking his chin thoughtfully.
"I concur with your hypothesis about Mad Lady, but according to the information we have, entering those special waters requires guidance from the Children of the Sea, following a specific route. How did Mad Lady 'teleport' inside? Was she lurking on the ship? Or does Bard carry some special coordinates with him? It's certainly not a physical item; otherwise, it would have been discovered.
"As for Ultraman, I've always suspected he's a native of Port Santa with a profound understanding of the sea prayer ritual. He likely orchestrated the prank last year."
At this point, Lumian stood up.
"My intuition suggests that if we can uncover Ultraman's actions in last year's prank and identify his role beyond being the mastermind, we can discern April Fool's true motives in this matter!"

Chapter 565: Possible Breakthrough

Franca's emotions were stirred by Lumian's words, and she responded with anticipation, "Then it's akin to catching a fox by its tail. When the time comes, we'll summon good helpers and strive to eliminate a few more key members of April Fool's!"

As she spoke, she gritted her teeth.

Despite Lumian and Franca making various guesses and deductions about Ultraman's role in last year's prank, none of them felt they had grasped the key to the mystery.

Franca exhaled and said, "Phew, there are still some important puzzle pieces missing. See if you can fish out more details."

She needed to return to Trier.

Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and asked thoughtfully, "How's your search for the Tamara family's descendant going?"

"Nothing yet, but Madam Judgment intends to inform the other Major Arcana card holders about this. She hopes they can help keep an eye out," Franca briefly explained her situation.

Lumian gazed at her face and said, "I have an investigative direction."

"What?" Franca perked up.

Lumian's lips curled up.

"Investigate the other members of the Demoness Sect in Trier.

"Given the close ties between certain members of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect, they might even be collaborating to establish the secret organization, Theosophy Order. There's a chance that one of them could directly join the Demoness Sect.

"Moreover, considering Madam Judgment's mission for you to infiltrate the Demoness Sect, discern the Primordial Demoness's current state and issues, why not investigate other Demonesses? Are you going to wait until you reach the level of a powerhouse like a Demoness of Red before gathering information? Do you believe there will be enough Angel-level Hunter Beyonder characteristics to aid your return to your original gender at that point?"

"Why the Demoness of Red?" Franca instinctively focused on this question.

Lumian smiled.

"Have you forgotten your nickname, Madame Red Boots?"

Franca smiled awkwardly.

"Isn't that to create a persona with characteristics that can be easily changed when you're on the run? It's clearly different from the description on the wanted poster.

"Ahem, isn't it too dangerous to investigate other Demonesses under the watchful eyes of the Demoness of Black?"

Lumian raised his eyebrows and smiled meaningfully.
"Why are you investigating the Tamara family?"
"Investigating Mirror People," Franca replied subconsciously.
Lumian asked again, "And who assigned you the Mirror People investigation?"
"The Demoness of Black..." Franca immediately shut her mouth.
She then muttered to herself, "However, an intricate balance needs to be struck. The source of the intel must be fabricated nicely; otherwise, we'll still be suspected."
Lumian didn't say anything else. He grabbed Franca's shoulder and planned to send her back to Trier.
Franca glanced at the curtained window and eagerly said, "Remember to ask me for help when you visit the combat nuns in the future."
She arrived in Port Santa in the afternoon and spent a long time using the fake name—Charname—she chose herself, and the face on Lumian's fake ID to travel about. With her fluent Highlander, she quickly grasped the folklore and combat nuns' styles.
Lumian scoffed dismissively.
"Don't even think about it. You can't impregnate them."
Franca replied indignantly, "Theoretically, it's not impossible, but it's quite dangerous. Think about it, Madame Pualis."
Lumian was left speechless.
"Besides, giving birth isn't the only important thing in life..." Franca continued to search for an excuse.
Lumian exhaled silently and activated the black mark on his right shoulder.
He disappeared from the master bedroom with Franca, who was still talking.
In no time, Lumian reappeared at the exact spot he had left.
Shaking his head and teasing Franca, he eased back into the armchair.
It had to be acknowledged that bantering and joking with friends, free from the need for caution, proved helpful in relieving the pent-up emotions within him.
Having regained his composure, Lumian reclined in his chair, sorting through the information on the sea prayer ritual and various rhetoric in his mind. He sought details that might unveil traces of Ultraman's existence and confirm any overlooked issues.
As a Conspirer, Lumian didn't require jotting down key points on paper. He relied on his eyes to decipher the hints. All the information formed a colossal spiderweb in his mind, slowly weaving and transforming.
After a while, he abruptly sat upright.

A breakthrough had been unearthed that could expose the essence of the sea prayer ritual.
Lumian stood and exited the master bedroom. He spotted Ludwig devouring a crispy potato omelet at the dining table in the living room.
Seated across from the boy, Lumian smiled as he retrieved the mutated black spider's compound eye, a spiritual ingredient lacking Beyonder characteristics.
Ludwig immediately glanced up at Lumian.
"Can you eat this?" Lumian flicked the black compound eye.
Ludwig vigorously nodded.
"Yes."
Intrigued, Lumian took out the Mystery Prying Glasses and inquired, "Can you eat this?"
"Not yet," Ludwig honestly replied.
Not yet. In other words, perhaps in the future? Lumian stowed away the Mystery Prying Glasses and placed the mutated black spider's compound eye on the dining table before him.
"I'd like you to translate something. If you can provide the correct answer, it's yours for consumption."
Ludwig gulped and agreed, "Okay."
Lumian recalled Lato Guiaro's strange pronunciation and emitted a chattering sound.
Finally, he said, "That's the general idea."
Ludwig shook his head in disappointment.
"I don't know."
He paused briefly before adding, "But I think I've heard it somewhere. It's somewhat familiar."
Had most of his memories and knowledge been sealed when his Body of Heart and Mind was sealed? Under Ludwig's reluctant gaze, Lumian returned the mutated black spider's compound eye to his Traveler's Bag.
Ludwig shoved a mouthful of potato omelet into his mouth and mumbled, "If you can find a creature that understands this language for me to eat, I can translate for you."
Wh... Lumian asked in surprise, "Can you acquire a certain ability or knowledge by consuming something?"
"There's a time limit, and it depends on the specific situation," Ludwig succinctly explained without elaborating.
Lumian nodded thoughtfully.
"Were you able to reveal information about the Batings Black Insect because you had consumed that kind of insect shortly before?"
Ludwig nodded. "Yes, it wanted to ambush me. It had been waiting for a long time."

That explains it. I had thought you had recovered some of your memories and knowledge. Indeed, a paralyzing attack wouldn't only target Lugano. After all, this could turn into a trap at any moment... Lumian stood up and left the dining table, returning to the master bedroom under Ludwig's pitiful gaze.
He had no means to find Ludwig a creature that understood the Language of the Sea. The Fisheries Guild members couldn't be certain if their interpretation was accurate.
After entering the master bedroom and closing the door, Lumian lowered his voice and said, "Temiboros, do you understand that language? Do you know the true meaning of that sentence?"
Termiboros's majestic voice echoed in Lumian's ears.
"In any case, it doesn't mean 'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion.'"
With that, Termiboros fell silent again, showing no intention of explaining the true meaning to Lumian.
Dammit, might as well not answer! You confirmed my guess but didn't unveil the true content! Heh heh, could it be that you're just pretending to understand? Lumian cursed inwardly, feeling that Termiboros, the Angel of Inevitability, was becoming less direct and straightforward than before. He didn't comprehend the art of sophistry.
Gradually, He learned how to infuriate!
Lumian composed himself and settled back into the armchair. Unfolding the letter, he began writing to Madam Magician.
Detailing his travels, he recounted what he had observed in Port Santa. Finally, he pieced together the pronunciation and wrote down the words to the unknown language. He gave the interpretation of what the Fisheries Guild believed: "We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion." Then, he made a request: Madam, have you encountered this language before? Do you know its true meaning?"
After folding the letter, Lumian initiated a ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger.
The "doll" messenger, adorned in a light-gold dress, emerged from the candle's flame and surveyed its surroundings. In a menacing tone, it declared, "Don't let that filthy child near me!"
"He's dining outside. He won't enter without my permission." For some reason, Lumian sensed hidden fear in the "doll" messenger's aggressive words.
The messenger nodded in satisfaction.
"Keep an eye on it! If it acts up, don't feed it!"
Using it as a substitute name... Lumian smiled and said, "If I don't feed him, something even more terrifying might happen."

The messenger fell silent for a moment before saying,
"Then feed it more!"
With that, the doll-like messenger swiftly withdrew the folded letter into the candle flame.
Lumian concluded the ritual, extinguished the candle's flame, and gazed at the master bedroom's door. He muttered to himself, It's indeed a dangerous sealed creature...
He then retrieved the golden pocket watch from Salle de Bal Brise and opened it to take a look.
Suddenly, he transformed into a shadow, seamlessly blending into the darkness.
There was still something to attend to tonight.
...
In the port district, atop the Fisheries Guild's castle-like building, Lumian found Lato Guiaro waiting on the spot resembling a tower, dressed in a formal suit.
"Are you on duty tonight?" Lumian casually pressed down on his golden straw hat, as if engaging in casual conversation with a friend.
Lato, the middle-aged man, sighed and said, "Originally, no, but since you wanted to come over, that's the case. We can't let an old man like the president do it, right?"
Without further ado, Lumian conjured delayed crimson, nearly white fireballs and hurled them into various corners of the tower.
Having completed this task, he waved at Lato Guiaro and melted back into the shadows.
Lato approached the tower's entrance, clenching his fists in fear.
In just 30 seconds, the crimson, nearly white fireballs exploded simultaneously.
Rumble!
The entire tower became engulfed in flames, and Lato, stationed at the entrance, was sent flying by the shockwave.
Bright scales had already surfaced on his body to mitigate the damage.
Rumble!
In less than half an hour, everyone in Port Santa who was well-informed learned something: the Fisheries Guild had been bombed!

Chapter 566: Gathered Clues

Solow Motel.

Lumian gazed at the red flames in the port district, tuning in to the distant commotion, anticipating potential visitors.

Before long, a knock echoed on the door.

Lumian didn't wait for Lugano to wake up. He pivoted and strode to the door.

The moment he swung it open, Noelia, clad in brown leather armor and a wimple, stood before him.

Noelia's expression was as cold as ice. She abruptly raised her hand and uttered ancient Hermes words, "Imprison!"

Lumian found himself instantly immobilized. Transparent walls or a viscous liquid seemed to encase him, turning him into an insect trapped in amber.

In the next second, Noelia unsheathed a straight sword from her back.

Simultaneously, Lumian's pants tightened, as if he had grown taller and more robust. An explosive force emanated from his body.

The transparent "amber" restraining him creaked, revealing invisible cracks.

With a whoosh, Noelia clutched the hilt of her straight sword with both hands, slicing through the air, carving through the already shaky "prison," aiming for Lumian's head.

Lumian's right fist, ready to strike, collided with the side of the straight sword, a condensed crimson, almost white flame accompanying the impact.

Amidst a deep and controlled explosion, the straight sword slanted, grazing the door frame as it descended to the ground.

Taking advantage of the situation, Noelia retreated, sheathed her sword, and inquired in Intisian, "Were you the one who blew up the Fisheries Guild?"

Upon witnessing this, Lumian refrained from retaliation. His body returned to its normal state as he smiled and replied, "It doesn't matter if I blew it up. What matters is whether anyone can prove it."

He understood that Noelia had issued a warning and wasn't truly targeting him. Otherwise, she would have employed other Beyonder powers after the "Imprison" instead of slashing with her sword.

Noelia, upholding the dignity of maintaining order in Port Santa throughout the year, used a questioning tone typical for various suspects.

"Why did you go to such lengths? Why did you cause such a commotion?"
Lumian turned his head, signaling Lugano, who had awakened at the commotion, to return to sleep in the servant's room.
Walking toward the recliner in the living room, he ignored Noelia's question and smiled.
"I've discovered something."
"Like what?" Noelia entered the suite and closed the wooden door behind her.
Lumian motioned toward the divan.
"Let's have a seat and talk. I wouldn't want you accusing me of being impolite."
Noelia glanced at Lumian and grinned.
"What kind of politeness is there without greeting me by pressing your cheek against mine?"
Her demeanor was direct.
Lumian eased into the recliner and responded to the question, "For instance, last year's sea prayer ritual failed."
Noelia didn't display surprise. She sat on the edge of the divan, leaning forward slightly to avoid the straight sword on her back from jabbing her.
"What else?"
Lumian pondered for a moment and casually remarked, "Also, the sea prayer ritual is a marriage to the sea.
"Furthermore, the Governor of the Sea is the husband of the sea, and the Maidens of the Sea embody the sea in the real world.
"Whether it's the Governor of the Sea or the Maidens of the Sea, the offspring they bear are the Children of the Sea. The first one possesses the purest bloodline..."
Though Lumian was well aware that the offspring of the women the Governor of the Sea had slept with were descendants of the sea, whether they were Maidens of the Sea or not, with his profound mystical knowledge and extraordinary insights, he couldn't help but consider that the Governor of the Sea having his children on his own was also part of the equation.
Phew, as expected, the more you know, the easier it is to be corrupted. I wouldn't have thought so in the past... Lumian sighed inwardly. Noelia, in surprise and admiration, sighed.
"You've made faster progress in your investigation than I anticipated. Most of it pieced together in such a short time."
It's been quite a while. My Language Comprehension charm will expire tomorrow. I wonder how much I'll retain from this enhanced week of study... Lumian grinned and teased, "Don't tell me you think my reputation as a great adventurer was just

boasting?"
"Claiming a bounty of 300,000 gold risot for the Demon Warlock certainly isn't a boast," Noelia diplomatically acknowledged, indicating she didn't underestimate someone capable of hunting down such a target.
Content, she nodded and continued, "While many Beyonders wield impressive abilities, their intelligence often falls short. They revel in belligerence and flaunt their might, but you're not one of them.
"Still, I must caution you not to push too far. Despite understanding your true motive for stirring up this commotion, we must uphold peace and order in Port Santa. Don't make things difficult for us."
Coupled with the warning, the implication is that you shouldn't disrupt Port Santa's current situation. You're free to investigate the sea prayer ritual, but stirring up trouble with the Fisheries Guild is a no-go. What exactly does your Church of Earth Mother aim for? It seems like there's a mixed desire—both wanting and not wanting some actions to be taken... Lumian contemplated Noelia's hint, a smile playing on his lips as he spoke, "If you had been more forthcoming, I wouldn't have had to work this hard."
Noelia offered a polite yet awkward smile.
"We lack extensive intel. All I can say is the Church allows the sea prayer ritual and the Fisheries Guild to obtain power from the sea for a reason, unrelated to our ability to solve it.
"I'm not privy to the reason—perhaps the Archbishop or our Fertility Order president could shed light."
Lumian scoffed and said, "Then why allow my investigation of the sea prayer ritual?"
With a sigh, Noelia replied, "Do we need to know? We didn't pry into your true motives for probing the ritual, did we?"
With that, the combat nun swiftly rose from the sofa, striding purposefully towards the suite's door.
After a few steps, she halted, a thoughtful expression crossing her face.
"There are ancient traces concealed in the basement of the Governor of the Sea's residence in Milo Village. They might unveil something crucial. It's best to seize an opportunity to investigate."
In the subterranean chamber beneath the Governor of the Sea's residence? According to Franca's account, Milo Village's ancestors had left behind symbols and patterns. Does Noelia suggest these hold vital information? Is the reason for the Church of Earth Mother knowingly allowing the occurrence of the sea prayer ritual hidden in that chamber?
If Juan Oro isn't deceptive or concealing the truth, and isn't

engaging in foul play, doesn't that imply that the Earth Mother Church possesses a deeper understanding of Milo Village's ancestors than their own descendants? It makes sense. After all, they once obliterated Milo Village and eradicated the faction of those ancestors. Over the past thousand years, there has been no disruption in the legacy, maintaining a prominent position in the real world. Lumian observed Noelia's departure without pressing further.

As he returned to the master bedroom, preparing for sleep, the "doll" messenger dropped a folded piece of paper, swiftly departing without a greeting.

Ludwig isn't that repulsive, except for being a bit ravenous and devouring everything, right?

Uh, Madam Magician does tend to stay up late. She's quickest with her replies at night... Lumian muttered under his breath as he picked up the response.

Swiftly unfolding it, he scanned the contents.

"Your performance in Port Santa has been impressive thus far.

"I won't interfere or provide excessive guidance. This is a prime chance for you to further digest the Conspirer potion.

"I've roughly reconstructed that sentence and read it multiple times. It's not in any language I know presently, but what I can confirm is its lack of natural power. However, it possesses a certain energy—language can possess such energy.

"What does this imply? It means that during the sea prayer ritual, it can't serve as a sacrificial language or communicate with Beyonder items—in simpler terms, the sea.

"So why does the sea prayer ritual work? The key may lie within the ceremonial ring. There's a high chance it has a distinct appearance, peculiar patterns, strong spirituality, and embedded knowledge. The sentence relies on its pronunciation, structure, and energy to activate the ring, making it functional.

"If you can recreate the ring's state after the vigil ritual, I'm confident I can decode its specific effects and approximate meaning."

That makes sense. When Lato Guiaro recited the words 'We espouse thee, O sea...' there were no indications of natural power being invoked. It must serve a different purpose... Lumian gained a deeper understanding of the sea sacrificial segment after reading Madam Magician's explanation.

Most of the clues seemed to await his infiltration of the Governor of the Sea's residence.

...

The next morning, Lugano led Ludwig through the streets,

grabbing breakfast according to the boy's cravings.
Out of nowhere, someone hurriedly passed by, head lowered, and seemingly slipped, accidentally bumping into him.
Lugano smoothly shifted his body, preventing the person from making contact.
He went the extra mile, helping the individual up and hypocritically saying, "Be careful."
The man quickly pressed something into Lugano's hand,
muttered an apology, and seamlessly melted into the crowd.
Lugano glanced down at his palm, revealing a crumpled white post-it note.
Unrushed, he didn't immediately read the note. After securing breakfast for Ludwig, he returned to Solow Motel and briefed Lumian.
Lumian took the crumpled note, unfolding it with a nonchalant gesture.
In delicate handwriting, it conveyed: "After last year's ritual, the sea experienced an anomaly."

Chapter 567: Possible Leaker

The failure of the sea prayer ritual last year caused an anomaly in the sea? Lumian couldn't help but interpret it that way after going through the contents.

Studying the note in his hand, a familiar fragrance wafted to him.

After some thought, Lumian recalled the source: the Paco family's Madame Giorgia's perfume.

Were they inexperienced or intentionally leaving a trace, implying the Paco family as the source of this information? Lumian mused to himself, recalling the sudden appearance of a humanoid lizard in the Paco family, the severe injuries to Rubió Paco's mother Martha, and the peculiarities surrounding them.

Is the core issue the sea's abnormality? Has it weakened the Paco family's Beyonders, causing an ordinary person without sea lineage to transform into a humanoid lizard? Perhaps they don't want other sea spawn to know and were lacking the strength to handle the humanoid lizard, thus seeking foreign adventurers to resolve it? Lumian gained a new insight into the contradictions within the Paco family's commission.

Lato Guiaro and Juan Oro hadn't mentioned the sea's anomaly.

They only noted the sea's increased violence without the ritual's appeasement, the frequent departure of Death Navigators from their territory, and the declining strength of the Children of the Sea.

From their perspective, this situation seemed normal, foreseeable, and unrelated to any anomaly.

Did the anomaly solely affect the Paco family, or did Juan Oro, Lato Guiaro, and others intentionally conceal this matter? Are they guarding against each other? Lumian speculated as he watched the note consumed by crimson flames in his palm.

He leaned toward the latter possibility. If the Paco family wasn't unique, the sea's anomaly should have widespread effects, not solely targeting them.

This understanding shed light on Rubió Paco's disdain when speaking of the Maidens of the Sea.

Discovering the truth about the Maidens of the Sea and his true lineage likely filled him with self-loathing and contempt for the entire sea prayer ritual. He'd rather forfeit his family's inheritance than marry another Maiden of the Sea. When the sea anomaly affected the entire Paco family, these emotions reached their zenith.

Lumian's suspicion grew that Nolfi's covert ally might be Rubió Paco.

Regardless, given the Paco family's resources and status, they could lead a comfortable life even without the sea prayer ritual.
Lugano stood to the side, observing his employer as Lumian delved into deep thought after reading the note. A twinge of nervousness and fluster crossed Lugano's demeanor.
Is something about to unfold again?
Lumian glanced up at Lugano, his expression pensive.
"Though I haven't reached Highlander proficiency, I've mastered the daily words I need. My body language suffices for a normal life in Port Santa. Plus, the folks I'll be dealing with know Intisian.
"I can settle the remaining balance now and offer you a free 'teleport' back to Trier."
Instinctively, Lugano shook his head.
"You can't attend to Ludwig when you're in action. If I leave now, who'll keep an eye on him?"
It's unclear who's watching whom... Lumian stared at Lugano for a brief moment, sensing, for the first time, an unsettling undertone in the interpreter's demeanor.
Despite prior attacks and potential risks, there was an inexplicable resistance to the suggestion of terminating the employment contract and taking his offer for a safe departure!
It wouldn't even cost him a verl d'or!
Considering Lugano's typical behavior and personality, Lumian assumed he would readily accept the remaining payment and leave Port Santa. Reality, however, proved otherwise.
Perhaps Lugano himself doesn't understand the rationale behind his decision. It is just an "instinctive" choice... Lumian nodded subtly, opting not to press further on settling the final payment and terminating their employment contract.
...
In Milo Village, within the Oro family's extensively renovated ancestral house, Juan Oro lounged by the window, puffing on a hookah, his gaze fixed on the sun dipping below the horizon, casting an orange glow. His thoughts drifted to the impending sea prayer ritual, just over a week away.
Abruptly, he turned his head, eyeing a shadow near the door.
The darkness stirred, and a man with green eyes, sporting a golden straw hat, white shirt, and black vest, emerged—the adventurer, Louis Berry.
"Why are you here again?" Juan Oro sighed, switching to Intisian.
Lumian chuckled, dragging a chair into the sun's waning rays.
"I've got another inquiry and a heads-up about a particular operation."
Juan's eyes narrowed.

"What scheme are you plotting now?"
"Tonight, I intend to infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence. If I go unnoticed, I'll observe the rooms where the vigil ritual is conducted. If discovered, I'll make a swift exit. This fits my radical persona and purported motives, doesn't it? It'll deflect suspicion from our covert collaboration," Lumian disclosed, a hint of a smile in his explanation.
Juan Oro harbored an unexplained sense of threat from Louis Berry, yet he found no tangible evidence. Despite this, Lumian's words resonated with an unsettling logic.
He drew a deep drag from his hookah in silence before he spoke.
"What are you getting at?"
Lumian smiled.
"I'm curious to see the ring that marries the sea, its intricate engravings, and the patterns it bears.
"I know you've only crafted the ring mold and haven't completed the ritual to infuse it with something special. However, after serving as deputy host 11 times and assisting even more, I'm confident you've memorized the patterns, symbols, and structure."
Juan Oro stiffened, his tone turning icy.
"What's your motive?"
The room's afterglow, touched by the setting sun, dimmed suddenly, as if being pulled into another dimension.
Unfazed, Lumian responded, "Why all the secrecy? Haven't you heard that the ring's design, patterns, and structure have long been exposed?"
Juan Oro's eyes narrowed."When did this happen?"
Lumian arched an eyebrow.
"Didn't my companion inform you of the true reason behind the sea prayer ritual failure?"
"He merely confirmed the fake Iru on the ship." Juan Oro had his suspicions.
Lumian grinned, shaking his head. He began unraveling his deductions, starting with the custom-made fake ring in Torres and the orchestrated lamb sacrifice sent to the ship after a bribe.
Juan Oro held his silence, his countenance growing darker.
After a tense pause, he spoke in a hoarse tone, "Not many are privy to the intricacies of the Ring of the Sea Queen, and the fact that sea spawn seldom inspect the sacrificial offerings' entrails. Each of them, the Children of the Sea, veterans of countless core rituals, are still alive... Iru and Salah were oblivious..."
As Juan Oro's words, spoken through gritted teeth, reached Lumian's ears, a sudden realization dawned upon him.
Ultraman is affiliated with the Fisheries Guild, a Child of the Sea

endowed with numerous powers and a distinct status!
There's also the possibility that he's manipulated such an individual, establishing a clandestine "partnership."
Without such a connection, how could April Fool's possess precise details about the ceremonial ring's appearance and exploit the sea prayer ritual's "supervisory" loophole?
Even though I Know Someone mentioned that Ultraman is a Sun pathway Beyonder, it doesn't rule out his identity as a Child of the Sea. Transforming into a Child of the Sea first and then drinking the Sun pathway's potion shouldn't pose an issue. The power of the Child of the Sea resonates with the cosmos, and the Sun and the cosmos are inherently compatible. Is April Fool's true motive for disrupting the sea prayer ritual preparations related to Ultraman or his collaborator aiming to fully control the power or the palace at the bottom of the sea? Lumian's thoughts gradually clarified.
He looked at Juan Oro with a relaxed smile and remarked, "If there wasn't a mole, how could the sea prayer ritual be disrupted so easily?"
Juan Oro had harbored similar suspicions for the past year; Lumian's words were irrefutable.
After some contemplation with an unpleasant expression, Juan Oro composed himself and stated, "I have to uncover the traitor before the official sea sacrifice..."
At this point, Juan Oro turned his gaze to Lumian.
"I might need your cooperation on something when the time comes."
Oh, you're fishing too? Lumian replied with a smile, "No problem."
Juan Oro set down his hookah and left his seat.
He walked to the desk, retrieved a pen and paper, and began sketching.
Nearly ten minutes later, the old man staggered to Lumian and handed him the paper.
Lumian glanced at it and recognized six designs—representing the front, left, right, back, front, and inner parts of the Ring of the Sea Queen. Each design featured intricate and mystifying symbols and patterns.
"It's actually useless for you to obtain it. It won't have any effect," Juan Oro said in a low, raspy voice. "The corresponding sea spawn have to use their special abilities to inscribe them on the ring and corrode them for six hours to please the sea and gain her recognition."
Lumian nodded and replied,"I have no intention of replicating one." He was obtaining it solely to send to Madam Magician for interpretation.

He then asked, "Is this the ring-making segment of the vigil ritual? Is there no other step?"
"There's another step. An assistant host will take the ring to the basement and place it in front of the patterns and symbols representing our ancestors for an hour. This is a show of respect to our ancestors, like greeting the elders before a wedding," Juan Oro explained briefly.
After a moment of contemplation, Lumian responded, "Can you also draw the patterns and symbols representing your ancestors?"
Juan Oro returned to the desk.
This time, he completed it in just two minutes.
Lumian took it and noticed scattered lines and arcs. Many details were missing from the middle, making it impossible to discern its original appearance.
"Seeing it in person might allow you to make connections easier." Juan Oro sighed again.
Lumian nodded.
"Then I'll infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence tonight."
Juan Oro tersely acknowledged his words.
"Be careful of the sea spawn there. They have their own specialties. They might not be very strong, but they can counter certain abilities of yours."
...
Late at night, under the crimson moonlight, Lumian appeared near the cathedral-like building.

Chapter 568: Patterns of the "Ancestors"

Lumian swiveled his head towards the docks, his body seamlessly blending into the shadows beyond the moonlight's reach.

Following the shadowy path, he smoothly bypassed the guards at the entrance, slipping into the sacred-looking building without a sound.

In the foyer, he came to a sudden halt.

Amidst the dark "fishnets," he spotted short figures with oddly large heads, bulging eyes, and wrinkled skin – like elders in miniature. Standing just over a meter tall, they were the "Little Devils" mentioned by Juan Oro, a species of sea spawn.

Infiltrating the shadows, these Little Devils patrolled the Governor of the Sea's residence, using their unique abilities to prevent any unauthorized entry.

Having encountered them before, Lumian knew these Little Devils weren't formidable opponents. Despite their talent for blending into shadows and creating illusions, he could dispatch a team with ease.

Yet, eliminating them discreetly posed a challenge. Lumian couldn't be certain that dealing with one group of Little Devils wouldn't stir up trouble and alert other creatures lurking in the building.

Focused, Lumian surveyed the areas untouched by shadows. In the crimson moonlight, he discerned vague figures drifting in the void, intermittently appearing and disappearing.

These were fish adorned in dark-gray armor, their bulging eyes resembling meatballs at both ends. Starlight-threaded "thin threads" peeked through the gaps in their scale-like armor.

The peculiar fish hovered in the air, scattering across different regions. Occasionally, they released bubbles carrying formless storms and impalement-inducing cracks.

Erupting bubbles created countless invisible spikes, setting perilous traps for teleporting "guests."

At the hall intersection and various aisles, silent three-man guard teams patrolled. Their expressions betrayed nothing, but Lumian noticed slender black insects, covered in bristles, emerging from their necks and mouths.

After a brief inspection, the Batings Black Insects swiftly retracted into the guards' bodies.

The eyes of sea creature statues on the wall appeared alive, scanning the areas with a strange awareness.

Just as Juan Oro said, there are a large number of different sea spawn here. Infiltrating silently amidst the diverse sea spawn here

proves to be a formidable task. Lumian, patient, opted to remain in the foyer, awaiting the right moment.
In under two minutes, a thunderous bang reverberated from the dock.
Crimson flames shot into the sky, casting an eerie glow on nearby windows, making them quiver.
Little Devils lurking in the shadows, Armored Monster Fish manipulating the surrounding void, Batings Black Insects orchestrating guards, and peculiar creatures concealed in the statues' eyes—all instinctively shifted their focus to the glass window near the dock.
Lumian sprang into action.
He orchestrated the disturbance with a delayed explosion!
Seizing the opportunity, he stealthily navigated through the shadows surrounding the Little Devils and skirted the region patrolled by the Armored Monster Fish.
Before other sea spawn could react, he pinpointed the room at the far end of the hall, relying on Juan Oro's intel.
A dim light emitted from the black mark on his right shoulder as he swiftly reached the door of the target room. In a blink, he transformed into a shadow, slipping through the crack.
Inside, Lumian discovered intricate patterns and symbols etched on the floor, ceiling, and walls, reminiscent of magnified versions of Juan Oro's hand-
drawn sacrificial ring pattern.
Besides that, nothing else caught his eye.
Lumian deduced, During the vigil ritual, some sea spawn enter this place, condense the patterns from every direction, and carve them into the ring mold. Then, they infuse them with special energy. Quickly scanning the area, he stepped out of the shadows, activating a black mark on his chest.
Nearly invisible water ripples danced on the surrounding walls, then subsided.
Bottle of Fiction!
Lumian "enclosed" the two connected rooms into the Bottle of Fiction. The entry requirement: ordinary humans.
He positioned himself near the opening of the Bottle of Fiction, deliberately creating loud footsteps as he hid by the door.
Almost instantly, certain sea spawn picked up on the disturbance.
Recalling the explosion at the docks and the towering flames, they realized they had fallen into a diversion.
Summoning the Armored Monster Fish, Batings Black Insects, Little Devils, and their cohorts, they ordered an investigation into the ring-making ritual venue for potential infiltrators.

Despite attempts to rush in through the door, the sea spawn inexplicably found themselves back in the hall.
The Armored Monster Fish, discerning the issue, released bubbles with a formless storm toward the entrance of the Bottle of Fiction.
As before they surged towards him, aiming to breach the room, Lumian, now a shadow creature, slipped through the crack at the base of the wooden door, quietly exiting the Bottle of Fiction and returning to the hall.
His ploy successfully diverted the sea spawn's attention, creating a chance for him to change positions.
Naturally, he needed to employ effective tactics a few more times!
Anticipating the enemy's disbelief in encountering the same trick repeatedly within a short span, Lumian knew they would assume there were alternative plans.
Of course, on the third attempt, heightened vigilance would set in. Everything they saw would seem like a distraction. When the moment arrived, Lumian could flip the strategy.
Seizing the moment when the sea spawn fixated on the Bottle of Fiction, Lumian deftly avoided the gathering of Little Devils. He circled the Armored Monster Fish, reaching a corner of the hall, and once again utilized Spirit World Traversal.
This time, Lumian's destination was the staircase leading to the basement.
The guards, lured into the hall, left the area unmonitored.
As Lumian's silhouette appeared at the staircase entrance, he swiftly transformed into a shadow, slipping into the basement through the darkness.
No guards or sea spawn patrolled this seemingly unimportant area, an area that was merely a testament to the villagers of Milo Village's reverence for their ancestors.
In his shadow creature form, Lumian possessed "natural" night vision. Even without a fireball, he could vaguely discern the dark basement.
Despite its dampness due to proximity to the sea, the absence of a moldy odor was thanks to the various Beyonder powers within the building.
At the center stood a decrepit stone platform, reminiscent of an altar for ancestor worship. Surrounding it were signs of destruction, leaving only disjointed lines, arcs, and indistinct patterns.
Do these fragmented symbols and patterns constitute the coat of arms of Milo Village's ancestors? Or do they possess mystical effects? Lumian scrutinized them repeatedly, struggling to reconstruct the undamaged version in his mind.

Yet, he sensed that since Noelia of the Fertility Order had alluded to the revealing nature of these symbols and patterns, he might extract valuable information.

What kind of information could it be? Maintaining his shadow creature form, Lumian extended into the darkness, surveying his surroundings.

Frowning, he whispered, Could it be that the Church of Earth Mother, fully capable of obliterating this place, deliberately left traces? Does this imply that the sea prayer ritual holds some influence over them too?

Lumian directed his gaze at the stone platform, the sacrificial offering to the ancestors, recalling Juan Oro's details about the ring-making ritual.

After crafting the Ring of the Sea Queen, it would rest here for an hour as a mark of respect to their ancestors.

Was it placed on this partially collapsed altar? Approaching the grayish-black stone platform, Lumian observed no dust accumulation. All remaining lines converged on an empty space at the center of the circle.

His heart stirred as he retrieved a Louis d'or, placing it in the center of the altar.

Nothing happened.

Undeterred, Lumian replaced the Louis d'or with gold risot, Mystery Prying Glasses, Flog boxing gloves, and various other items.

Yet, still no anomaly.

Persistence drove him. Lumian pulled out the silver Lie earring from his pocket and positioned it on an empty space on the stone platform.

In the next moment, a surreal sensation enveloped Lumian.

Within the stone platform, illusory lines and arcs materialized, intertwining with remnants to form two distinct patterns:

One pattern featured layers of doors sketched with simple strokes, while the other resembled a clock divided into twelve sectors, albeit having a single hand.

Lumian observed keenly, sensing something adhering to the Lie earring.

In an instant, the lines from the stone platform dimmed, retracted, and returned to their original positions. Normalcy resumed.

Are these the patterns representing Milo Village's ancestors? Or did they gain knowledge from the initial revelations? Lumian sensed sea spawn surging toward the basement. After muttering to himself, he seized the Lie earring and "teleported" away.

...
In the master bedroom of the suite at Solow Motel.
As Lumian's figure manifested, he settled down and began writing to Madam Magician. Unfazed by checking the changes in the Lie earring, he intended to send it to his Major Arcana card holder for inspection.
Recreating the patterns, symbols, structure, and various scenes from the Governor of the Sea's residence, Lumian neatly folded several letters, arranged a ritual, and summoned the "doll" messenger.
Then, he patiently awaited the reply.

Chapter 569: Language Interpretation

The crimson moonlight seeped through the not-so-thick curtains, casting its glow on the desk, already yellowed by the gas wall lamp's illumination, emphasizing its presence.

Lumian perused his freshly acquired Highlander textbook, patiently waiting for over half an hour before finally receiving a reply from Madam Magician via the "doll" messenger.

The letter was concise and spanned only two pages.

"Let's start with the basics.

"Combining the patterns, symbols, and structure of the ring—although I can't precisely decipher the meaning of that sentence—I can identify its composition and the practical application of various short sentences.

"It breaks down into three segments:

"The first part serves to precisely locate the ring, facilitating the subsequent activation of special characteristics and the infusion of energy contained in the language.

"The second part involves injecting the energy carried by the words into the ring through resonance and other forms, activating a magic circle formed by patterns and symbols. Consider the sacrificial ring as a charm. The second paragraph is akin to its designated special activation incantation. It doesn't necessitate invoking supernatural powers but requires prior guidance.

"In the third part, I suspect it's a ciphertext attached to the ring. In simpler terms, once the ceremonial ring is fully activated through the first two parts, it records and carries the final ciphertext into the sea to transmit it to something.

"Are you following so far? The ceremonial ring is like a special key, functional only after activation. Furthermore, it necessitates the corresponding password to open the 'doors' of the target.

"Heh heh, the actual meaning of 'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion' is roughly akin to 'a key to unlock the passageway. The password is XXXXXXXXX.' Naturally, if translated directly, it'll differ significantly, but that should capture the essence."

Lumian couldn't resist a smirk.

Recalling the solemn recitation by the previous Governors of the Sea, envisioning the act of marrying the sea, anyone familiar with the corresponding language would likely burst into laughter.

What sea, what espousal, what dominion! After all the complexity, it boiled down to unlocking and opening a passageway—a simple password entry!

Contemplating sharing this interpretation with Juan Oro, Lato

Guiaro, and the others, Lumian pondered their likely reactions.
No, they wouldn't believe it. A millennium or two of misunderstanding had morphed into faith, perseverance, and legacy. Admitting a mistake wasn't something they'd easily embrace.
Regardless, the result would be the same. Interpretation or translation, it didn't matter how they perceived it!
Collecting himself, Lumian turned to the second page of the letter, eager to continue reading.
"Next is the more complicated part.
"The two patterns you witnessed in the Governor of the Sea's basement have a profound history, stretching back to the early Fourth Epoch.
"They serve as symbols of mysticism and the coat of arms of ancient nobles. One of them is linked to an acquaintance—no, a familiar Angel, Amon!
"The pattern resembling a clock signifies the Worm of Time. It stands as the Amon family's coat of arms."
Worm of Time? The Amons' coat of arms? Why is it Him again! Lumian's eyes narrowed, feeling as though he was still entrenched in the Amons.
What connection did Milo Village's ancestors, Port Santa's sea prayer ritual, and the distinctiveness of those waters share with the Amons?
On the surface, no apparent link existed!
As Lumian's thoughts raced, he suddenly sensed a connection between the sea prayer ritual and the former King of Angels of the Marauder pathway.
Reflecting on the key members involved in the April Fool's ritual prank, Bard, a Beyonder of the Marauder pathway, and Mad Lady, belonging to the neighboring Apprentice pathway, even prayed to The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth—a being with profound influence over the Marauder pathway.
While this didn't directly point to the Amons, the gathering of Marauder-
related individuals suggested a reasonable association between the sea prayer ritual and the Marauder pathway.
Lumian exhaled, lowering his head to read further insights from Madam Magician.
"The layers of doors come from the Abraham family. Yes, the Abraham family, one of the five nobles of the Tudor Empire. I previously mentioned that in the Tudor Empire, only five families hold the hereditary duke title: Abraham, Amon, Antigonus, Jacob, and Tamara. Among them, the Abrahams control the Apprentice

pathway. Remember, Apprentices often represent seals.
"Therefore, it's plausible to believe that the sea prayer ritual predates previous estimates, tracing back to before the demise of the Fourth Epoch's Tudor Empire. Encountering matters related to the Tudor Empire sure isn't a coincidence for you, is it?
"Do you now grasp the essence of the sea prayer ritual? Further explanations may not be necessary, correct?
"I'm starting to suspect that Milo Village's ancestors misunderstood the initial sentence's meaning, leading to the expansion of the sea sacrifice and vigil from the revelation. This resulted in an absurd sea marriage ritual spanning a millennium or two. It could very well be a manifestation of that individual's mischievous nature, reveling in playing a joke on everyone, indifferent to the fate of others.
"See, this is what a prank should be. Those April Fool's folks could learn a thing or two.
"If you have more questions or haven't clarified certain aspects, feel free to write and ask.
"By the way, Lie now possesses a temporary ability lasting half a month. It can absorb a specific amount of power from a target, though this power won't endure long. For ordinary people, it might persist for half a year or a year. However, for you, it won't last more than a week due to the conflict with your powers."
Lumian averted his gaze from the letter, his thoughts in disarray.
Madam Magician suggests that the uniqueness of those waters originated from the ancestor of the Abraham family and a certain Amon? The core of the sea prayer ritual was personally devised by these two Angel-level figures. They guided the ancestors of Milo Village in Port Santa and left behind a revelation, compelling them to perform the ritual annually?
Due to Amon's mischievous nature, the ancestors of Milo Village misunderstood the true meaning of that sentence, thinking they were meant to marry the sea. Consequently, the core of the sea prayer ritual became increasingly complex, expanding into more segments over the years. It transformed into an extensive prank that persisted for over a millennium?
Having comprehended Madam Magician's hypothesis, Lumian reconsidered the essence of the sea prayer ritual.
Appeasing the special entity concealed at the bottom of the sea—perhaps that palace?
Apprentice represents a seal... Marauder is stealing...
Stealing...
Lumian suddenly glanced down at his left chest.
He grasped the essence of the sea prayer ritual!

Finding a husband for the sea, pacifying its violence, genuinely pleasing it, and obtaining corresponding boons were all absurd reasons concocted by Milo Village's ancestors after being misled!
The essence of the sea prayer ritual was to steal boons!
The "palace" at the bottom of the sea had been sealed by the Apprentice pathway, but the ancestor of the Abraham family worried that, over time, the seal's power would wane, allowing the "palace" to gradually regain strength. To counter this, he enlisted Amon to devise a ritual for regularly siphoning off the restored power of the palace each year, preventing it from breaking through the seal.
Consequently, after each sea prayer ritual, the sea area would become tranquil, free from excessive storms. The previous year's failed ritual had allowed the palace to accumulate a certain degree of strength. Consequently, the sea experienced abnormality, leading to an increased number of shipwrecks, and Death Navigators departed the special sea area more frequently.
The reason for only entering the sea when the stars aligned and following a specific route to reach the destination was that only then would a complex passageway appear in the outer seal!
Lumian stood up and took a few steps forward.
Having unraveled the essence of the sea prayer ritual, he comprehended the Earth Mother Church's motive for perpetuating it.
Initially, the clergyman of the Earth Mother Church, lacking thorough investigations, destroyed Milo Village, putting an end to the sea prayer ritual. However, at the bottom of the building, they discovered the coat of arms representing the two nobles of the Tudor Empire, halting the final step in time. Later, they realized they needed to dispatch demigod-level Saints to deal with the unique waters each year. High-end forces were required to guard it for an extended period, making it quite troublesome. Consequently, when the sea prayer ritual resurfaced, they tacitly agreed to the reconstruction of Milo Village.
In most cases, the sea prayer ritual didn't adversely affect the innocent or disrupt local order. Every Governor of the Sea possessed a certain amount of the sea's bloodline, and while the Maidens of the Sea would eventually transform into humanoid lizards in their old age, they could alter their fates and enjoy power and wealth for 30 to 40 years or even longer.
For Maidens of the Sea seeking free love, the Church of Earth Mother likely tacitly consented or even aided their escape, as the chances of success were otherwise quite low.
So, why did the Fertility Order encourage me to investigate the sea

prayer ritual? Why did Noelia provide some information while withholding crucial details? Lumian's confusion swiftly dissipated. The real entity fishing behind the scenes was not the Fisheries Guild but the Church of Earth Mother!

The failure of last year's sea prayer ritual had alarmed the Church of Earth Mother, fearing a similar problem this year. Observing Louis Berry's inclination to investigate the sea prayer ritual, they encouraged him to do so, allowing potential saboteurs hidden in the shadows to contact him, surface, and capture them all at once!

Phew. Lumian exhaled, redirecting his focus to April Fool's.

Now, he was certain that April Fool's intended to break the seal around those special waters.

Last year marked the first step towards breaking the seal, but it hadn't progressed to the point where the underwater "palace" could breach it. This year, they would undoubtedly create a similar situation once again. Otherwise, if the sea prayer ritual succeeded, their pranks from last year would be in vain!

The question now was, what would the key members of April Fool's do? How could they seize the benefits represented by the palace and evade the corresponding dangers? Lumian stared at the gas wall lamp emitting a yellowish glow, sinking into deep thought.

...

More than a week quickly elapsed, and in the blink of an eye, the day of the sea prayer ritual arrived.

After completing his breakfast, Lumian heard the melodic tunes of various musical instruments wafting in from the street outside.

With a smile, he wiped his mouth with a napkin and strolled toward the window, welcoming the bright sunlight pouring in.

Chapter 570: Festival

On Aquina Street, a two-story ceremonial boat crafted from wood, cardboard, and adorned with ribbons rolled forward, propelled by four sleek horses.

This intricate vessel mimicked the Governor of the Sea's boat, designed to economize materials and size, allowing horses to guide it through the city.

Eight men and eight women, dressed vibrantly, stood on both upper and lower levels of the flower boat. They sang and danced, their joy infecting the spectators on both sides of the street.

Port Santa's premier folk orchestra surrounded the ceremonial boat, playing rhythmic drumbeats and a variety of instruments such as clarinets, oboes, flutes, and strings.

The onlookers on the roadside were in high spirits, alternating between singing and following the ceremonial boat, hoping to catch a refreshing spray from the water droplets scattered by the sixteen men and women.

Observing the scene from the fifth floor of the Solow Motel, Lumian sensed that the sea prayer ritual had evolved beyond a mere sacrificial ceremony. Excluding its core aspects, it had transformed into a city-wide folklore festival.

Despite many residents of Port Santa being devout followers of the Earth Mother and not attributing spiritual significance to the sea, they embraced the festivities, dancing and celebrating on this special day.

As the flower boat concluded its tour of Aquina Street, Lumian turned to Lugano and remarked,

"Take good care of Ludwig today. No matter which celebration you attend, ensure he's with you."

"Yes, Boss," Lugano replied, influenced by the cheerful atmosphere of the sea prayer ritual, his emotions lifted.

Without wasting any time, Lumian snatched his golden straw hat, exited the suite, and descended the stairs.

In the lobby, his gaze fell upon Otta Guillaume, the Solow Motel owner, doling out cash to the lady at the front desk and the two attendants—two risot each.

"Is this a holiday bonus?" Lumian inquired in Intisian.

Otta Sr. chuckled and replied, "No bonus, just their compensation. They're on duty at the motel today, keeping an eye on the place. They'll miss out on the sea prayer ritual and other celebrations.

"I'm heading to the docks to see my little cabbage dance!"

"I'll be there too," Lumian said with a smile, embracing the festive ambiance once again.

If the sea prayer ritual lacked mystic elements, Lumian would have fully immersed himself in the festive atmosphere, reminiscent of the few years of Lent he experienced in Cordu.
Exiting the motel, Lumian leisurely strolled towards the harbor, taking note of Port Santa's residents bedecked in their most glamorous and festive attire. At a glance, the streets appeared to be awash with a sea of colors.
His attire—a white shirt, black vest, and dark pants—made him stand out like a foreigner amidst the lively crowd.
Lumian adorned the golden straw hat, injecting a splash of color into his appearance.
The rhythmic chime of bicycle bells accompanied the passing of wooden crate-laden bicycles. Vendors energetically peddled popsicles of various flavors to eager citizens anticipating the sea dance and boat race.
Observing the two segments with a relaxed demeanor, Lumian savored the festivities. He patiently waited until the two-story festival boat, carrying the Governor of the Sea and the Maidens of the Sea, embarked on its journey to Milo Village before departing the port.
Choosing to abstain from other citizen-organized celebrations, Lumian sought refuge in a public washroom within the nearest department store, slipping into a cubicle.
Triggering the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian materialized in a concealed corner of Milo Village.
Shifting into a shadow creature, he seamlessly infiltrated the Oro family's blend of ancient and modern architecture, arriving at Juan Oro's bedroom.
The president of the Fisheries Guild awaited Lumian's arrival, and upon seeing the figure of the adventurer, Louis Berry, emerge from the darkness, Juan Oro, with deep wrinkles, gestured towards the unconscious Milo villagers on the floor.
"These are two of the four deputy hosts for the vigil and the sea sacrificial ritual. Choose one to assume his form."
This condition was pivotal for Lumian's collaboration with Juan Oro. He sought continuous participation in the core sections of the sea prayer ritual.
Initially hesitant due to the inability to deceive other sea spawn and introduce a stranger onto the ship, Juan Oro only agreed to allow Lumian to infiltrate the Governor of the Sea's residence before the vigil ritual, observing it discreetly.
However, with Ultraman under suspicion as a key figure in the Fisheries Guild, Lumian seized the opportunity when Juan Oro required cooperation and assistance, showcasing the abilities of

the Lie earring. Thus, Lumian devised a plan to disguise himself as a specific deputy host and gain access to the ship.
After studying one of the deputy hosts for a few moments, Lumian adorned a silver earring. He replicated the appearance of the chosen deputy host, seamlessly blending into his guise.
In no time, except for his clothing, there was no discernible difference between Lumian and the deputy host.
"It's my turn," Juan Oro said in a deep Intisian voice.
He decided to take on the guise of another deputy host and personally board the ship to avert any potential mishaps.
Concerned about Louis Berry's involvement in the sea sacrifice and wary of lurking enemies employing unknown methods to cause trouble, Juan Oro believed that everything would converge during the sea sacrifice segment. Boarding the boat covertly would enable him to address unforeseen circumstances in time, delivering a strategic "surprise."
Juan Oro harbored suspicions that Louis Berry might be an accomplice of last year's saboteurs, his prior actions serving as a ploy to deceive them and allow him to openly disrupt the ritual at a crucial moment.
Lumian casually tossed the Lie earring to Juan Oro, who proceeded to change into a dark-blue robe embroidered with various sea elements.
Upon donning the silver earring, Juan Oro experienced a remarkable control over every detail of his body.
Attempting to adjust the wrinkles on his face, he observed himself becoming ten to twenty years younger in the mirror.
Despite his potent and diverse Beyonder powers, the president of the Fisheries Guild couldn't help but marvel.
"How magical."
After completing his disguise, Lumian pointed at the unconscious deputy host.
"Who's responsible for keeping an eye on them and preventing their appearance before the sea prayer ritual?"
"My wife," Juan Oro replied, already prepared.
She, a former Maidens of the Sea and the current Matriarch of the Oro family, possessed considerable strength. While she hadn't participated in any ring-
making rituals, she was a trusted individual who wouldn't divulge secrets.
Lumian redirected the conversation, inquiring, "As the president of the Fisheries Guild, won't you be suspected if you don't wait for news of the successful sea prayer ritual with the other committee members?"

"No, I don't go every year. I can also wait for news at home, and my wife will pretend to be me," Juan Oro stated, pointing at Lie on his left ear and removing it.
After confirming the details, Lumian inquired further, "Have you investigated any of those who nearly died and came back to life, or have their personalities undergone a significant change?"
These individuals were key members of the Fisheries Guild familiar with the specific design of the Ring of the Sea Queen and the complete details of the sea prayer ritual.
According to Franca, every member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society was a soul from another world, having "resurrected" in recently deceased human bodies. This information could help identify who might be Ultraman.
Juan Oro slowly shook his head.
"No, at least not in my memory. Time was tight, so I couldn't investigate them one by one."
The rejuvenated elder, now appearing in his prime, continued, "Remember, your name is Brian now. My name is Jorge. If you don't understand what others are saying later, it's fine. I'll hint at you. When you need to answer questions, I'll help you."
"Alright." Lumian maintained the pretense of not knowing Highlander.
In reality, having extensively studied under the effects of the Language Comprehension charm, he had already mastered more words and grammar. While still unable to fully comprehend others' words, he could grasp key words, tense, and the active and passive voice, allowing him to roughly understand the meaning. Expressing himself with short sentences and simple structures presented no challenge.
...
Clad in the dark-blue robe of a deputy host, Lumian entered the Governor of the Sea's residence, guided by Juan Oro, who no longer staggered. Passing through a hall adorned with sea creature statues, they reached the room where the Governor of the Sea maintained his vigil.
The current Governor of the Sea, Simon of the Guiaro family, was from a branch with a thin bloodline, unqualified to reside in the ancestral house.
At that moment, Simon sat cross-legged on the cold floor, suppressing his excitement. With half-closed eyes, he felt the moist air enveloping him.
Although Lumian refrained from activating his Spirit Vision, he sensed various sea spawn bustling in the shadows, the void, and the statues.

Juan Oro led Lumian out of the room, guiding him to the most secluded part of the building. Opening the wooden door to the servants' quarters, Juan Oro addressed the fake Governor of the Sea, Miguel, lying on the bed.
"Once the sea prayer ritual succeeds, you can leave, but you must depart Port Santa with the wealth you've amassed over the past year."
Miguel sat up excitedly. "Alright, alright!"
Though their conversation occurred in Highlander, Lumian grasped the essence.
After this exchange, Juan Oro translated the conversation for Lumian, emphasizing, "You can verify if I'm lying based on Miguel's expression."
Lumian silently pondered, thinking, So what if you're not lying? What you said might not be done... He then returned to the hall, assuming a cross-
legged position opposite the other two deputy hosts.
As time passed, midnight arrived, marking the completion of the Ring of the Sea Queen. One of the deputy hosts retrieved it and guided it to the basement in the dim moonlight.
The moment had come to pay homage to their ancestors.
Lumian observed the scene in silence and suddenly had a thought.

Chapter 571: Key Details

The Governor of the Sea's residence hall opened into a labyrinth of rooms, its scarcity of windows allowing only a trickle of light despite the crimson moon's glow. The dimness cast a cloak of silence over the place.

Even as the deputy host, clutching the coveted Ring of the Sea Queen, moved with caution, the floor still betrayed him with a faint echo.

Lumian observed him heading towards the basement staircase, a sudden realization dawning upon him.

Once in the basement, the deputy host could effortlessly switch the authentic Ring of the Sea Queen with a crafted counterfeit without alerting anyone.

The other deputies were occupied in the hall, and the Governor of the Sea, undergoing physical modifications, had the Maidens of the Sea by his side. The sea spawn were scattered elsewhere.

Frowning, Lumian shot a sidelong glance at another deputy host. He lowered his voice and addressed Jorge, the form Juan Oro had taken, in Intisian.

"Every year, during the vigil ritual, does a deputy host send the Ring of the Sea Queen alone to the basement, retrieving it an hour later?"

He stressed the word "alone."

Juan Oro nodded subtly.

"Yes. There's no need for extra protection in this building..."

But just as Juan Oro was about to continue, he halted abruptly.

This presented a golden opportunity to swap the Ring of the Sea Queen unnoticed.

The fact that external enemies couldn't breach the building didn't mean the deputy hosts within were without their own problems!

Lumian wasted no time and turned to Juan Oro, uttering, "Should I follow, or will you take charge?"

Juan Oro regarded the matter gravely, rising from his seat and responding, "I'll go."

Harnessing his abilities, he steadied himself and swiftly caught up with the deputy host. In a deep tone, he stated, "Let's go together. I want to seize the chance to pay my respects to my ancestors."

The other deputy host raised no objections.

As Lumian observed the two lighting their lanterns and descending into the basement, his mind instinctively filled in the upcoming sequence.

Place the Ring of the Sea Queen on the decrepit stone platform... Offer prayers to the ancestors... Return to the surface... Re-enter

and retrieve it an hour later...
During that hour, the Ring of the Sea Queen sits unguarded in the basement, vulnerable to any opportunistic interference... If someone had concealed themselves there beforehand, swapping the genuine ring for a counterfeit would be a straightforward task...
Certainly, infiltrating and concealing oneself in this location is no simple feat. I can't even do it; I could last a mere two minutes before being detected by the sea spawn...
The Ring of the Sea Queen has to be positioned on that worn stone platform. Any deviations—deviations...
With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Lumian suddenly recalled the transformations in the Lie earring when it rested on the weathered stone platform in the basement.
The Seer pathway item had activated a pattern embodying an Apprentice and a Marauder, granting it the ability to siphon someone's power that lasted half a month!
Lie could accomplish this feat, but what about the Ring of the Sea Queen?
Though not an item of the Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder pathway, it had been meticulously crafted based on a ritual passed down by an Amon. Perhaps, over time, it could activate the unique characteristics of the basement, gradually assimilating with thieving qualities.
Yes! Considering that the essence of the sea sacrificial ritual involves extracting power from the seal at the bottom of the sea and claiming it, the Ring of the Sea Queen, being a key item, should not only be capable of loosening the seal to a certain extent but also possess the power-stealing ability. It could distribute the gains among various participants in the ritual—
the host receiving the most, followed by the Maidens of the Sea as assistant hosts, and the deputy hosts and sailors gaining some within the ritual's range, provided they possessed similar powers!
In essence, Juan Oro and his companions' understanding of the ring-making ritual is incomplete. The "paying homage to the ancestors" segment is integral and crucial. Without honoring the ancestors, the sea sacrificial ritual would merely open the seal without stealing the accumulated power. Instead, it would erupt and disperse... Lumian had just marveled at the mysticism's terrifying complexity when a sudden alarm gripped him.
He realized he had overlooked a pivotal detail.
According to Madam Magician's interpretation of the Ring of the Sea Queen's functions and her speculations about the essence of the entire sea prayer ritual, the substitution of the genuine Ring of

the Sea Queen with the fake ring customized by April Fool's in Torres should have prevented the catastrophic phenomenon of the sea's fury consuming the Governor of the Sea, all the deputy hosts, and some sailors in the subsequent ritual!
The fake ring hadn't undergone the initial ring-making ritual, leaving its patterns, symbols, and structure devoid of the necessary mysticism characteristics. Even if the Governor of the Sea recited the prescribed words, he couldn't infuse energy into it to open the seal!
As a complete counterfeit, it shouldn't have triggered any phenomena. However, due to its incapacity to extract the amassed power, the sea area would experience more shipwrecks, and the weather would deteriorate.
To align with the events of the previous year, the fake ring thrown by the Governor of the Sea had to complete the first part of the ring-making ritual. Still, without being placed in the basement to honor the ancestor, it could only partially open the seal, unable to extract and monopolize the gathered power. This incomplete process led to a sudden eruption, causing the sea to "rage"!
Lumian's eyes narrowed slightly. As a Conspirer, he had seized the core of the matter.
Two Rings of the Sea Queen were on the ship, but both were fakes.
The ring brought by the deputy host to the ritual ship was also a forgery. In fact, the authentic Ring of the Sea Queen hadn't made an appearance during last year's sea prayer ritual!
The genuine Ring of the Sea Queen, which had undergone the entire ring-
making ritual as per the Fisheries Guild's knowledge, hadn't been placed on the stone platform in the basement to fulfill the ritual of honoring the ancestors. Consequently, it was also a sham—a counterfeit ring lacking the most crucial effect!
The deputy host who had taken the Ring of the Sea Queen into the basement and retrieved it last year might also be part of the problem!
The peripheral members affiliated with April Fool's weren't considered trustworthy. Their actions likely didn't disrupt the overall plan. The fake ring concealed in the lamb's stomach and the Bard's performance likely served as preparations for subsequent investigations, camouflaging vital clues. As Lumian's thoughts raced, Juan Oro and the deputy host returned to the hall.
"It's on the stone platform," whispered the president of the Fisheries Guild, masquerading as Jorge, to Lumian.
Lumian refocused his attention and casually inquired, "Who was responsible for sending the Ring of the Sea Queen to the basement

last year?"
"I don't know. Without any special arrangements, anyone can do it. The four deputy hosts in the hall last year died in the sea's rage when the ritual failed." Juan Oro, sensing Lumian's suspicion, clarified.
Dead? Unlikely... Lumian lacked the corresponding item for spirit channeling and didn't have time to search for it. All he could do was ask, "Which one of them was familiar with the ring-making ritual and knows the details of the Ring of the Sea Queen?"
"None of them; it was their first time serving as deputy hosts." Juan Oro shook his head. "Besides, as I said, those who know these secrets are still alive."
If the deputy host wasn't Ultraman... Then who was it? Lumian's mind raced as he arrived at a conclusion.
It was Mad Lady!
Similar to Bard, she utilized the same technique to alter her appearance. With Ultraman's assistance, she assumed the guise of a deputy host, completing the final step in creating the Ring of the Sea Queen. Then, she boarded the ceremonial ship with it.
Lumian had been puzzled by how Mad Lady could locate the special sea and rescue Bard accurately and in time. Now, he had the answer.
Mad Lady was present on the ceremonial ship, right beside Bard. There was no need for coordinated locations or timing!
Initially suspecting Mad Lady to collaborate with Bard, Lumian now realized that Bard worked with Mad Lady, providing assistance in case of unexpected developments and shouldering the responsibility of misleading investigations.
Dammit, Faceless abilities are so annoying. April Fool's is so annoying! Lumian's emotions fluctuated as he struggled to contain his emotions as he cursed. Relying on his Ascetic trait, he restrained himself from erupting.
More importantly, while he had unraveled the issues with the sea prayer ritual from last year, the identities of Ultraman and the forthcoming plans of April Fool's remained elusive.
...
The night passed in silence.
On an out-of-fashion sailboat in the harbor, Charname, sporting a short, round-rimmed felt hat, emerged from the cabin and approached Nolfi, who stood at the edge of the deck. Charname inquired, "Can we enter those special waters if we set off now?"
Nolfi nodded, responding, "Yes, the stars will align in a specific pattern after midnight."
Following Lumian's instructions, she and Batna had rented a boat

for a few days from other ports along the same coastline.
Charname chuckled, saying, "Then let's set off!"
Observing the surprised and puzzled expressions of Nolfi and Batna, he explained, "If we follow the Governor of the Sea's ceremonial ship, we'll undoubtedly be discovered by the Fisheries Guild. Setting off an hour or two later would be meaningless. Therefore, we'll go ahead of time and hide there, patiently waiting for an opportunity!"
Although Nolfi didn't understand the nature of the opportunity Charname referred to, she didn't inquire. She responded with anticipation, "Okay."
Charname then turned to Batna.
"Are you joining us? It will be very dangerous."
Batna's expression fluctuated. After more than ten seconds, he declared, "I'm going!"
Charname clicked his tongue but remained silent.
At that moment, Nolfi frowned, glancing at other parts of the deck, and asked, "What about the sailors here? We can't leave the sea without them, and they can't handle too much danger."
Charname chuckled.
"Don't worry, we have sailors who can handle danger."
As soon as he finished speaking, he half-turned, raising his right hand to the third level of the cabin. He clasped his index finger and thumb into a ring and extended his other three fingers.
Soon, the captain, first mate, second mate, and all the sailors emerged,
their eyes tightly shut. Like sleepwalkers, they lined up and walked down the gangway toward the docks.
Batna and Nolfi's eyes froze, as if trapped in a terrifying dream.

Chapter 572: The Real Target

Under the crimson moonlight, the crew members stumbled towards the dock like the living dead, moving towards the various buildings concealed in the darkness.

In seven to eight minutes, their figures vanished from different spots.

Immediately after, Nolfi and Batna observed pitch-black shapes emerging at the edge of the cabin, and eerie pale-white or dark-green flames igniting across the deck.

Figures crawled out of the pitch-black flames.

Some wore tattered clothes, and their skin visibly rotted. Others were white bones with fragments of flesh hanging from them. Pale-white flames protruded from their eye sockets.

These were all corpses!

Soon, a half-rotted corpse in a dirty jacket hoisted the sail. The corpse with a missing breastbone stowed the heavy anchor. The other corpses took their positions, steering the sailboat slowly away from the port.

As they gazed at the decaying flesh, pale-white bones, and sinister flames of different hues, Batna and Nolfi felt as if they had stepped into a novel world.

Horror novels! Ghostly tales!

"Navigator, it's time for you to work." Charname's voice snapped Nolfi back to reality.

...

In the Governor of the Sea's residence.

Lumian leaned against the statue-less wall, surveying the other deputy hosts in the hall, including Juan Oro.

Uncertain if any of them were genuine, they could easily be impersonated by a Faceless.

In the upcoming operation, the only person he could unequivocally trust was himself.

An hour passed in an indescribable silence. This time, Lumian took the initiative, leading Juan Oro into the basement to retrieve the Ring of the Sea Queen, completing the "paying homage to the ancestors" segment.

The ring rested on the dilapidated stone platform, untouched. Lumian couldn't be certain if it was authentic, but the patterns, symbols, and structure seemed intact, and no one had lurked in the basement after inspection.

Maintaining his calm demeanor and a tense heart, Lumian patiently waited until 6 a.m., feeling both mental and physical fatigue dissipate.

Two hours later, the current Governor of the Sea, Simon, exited the vigil room with four Maidens of the Sea and approached the building's door.
Lumian, Juan Oro, and the other deputy hosts promptly stood up and followed.
The two-story sailboat, adorned with colorful flowers, docked at the Milo Village's docks. Villagers acted as guards, blocking anyone daring to approach.
Ascending the gangway to the deck, Lumian sensed an invisible gaze from every window, flower, and mast—a familiar feeling from when the statues in the Governor of the Sea's residence came to life.
He calmly navigated through the gazes, adhering to Juan Oro's instructions to stand at the left edge of the deck.
This was the designated spot for him, the deputy host named Brian.
Bang! Bang! Bang!
On the dock of Milo Village, vibrant paper fragments burst forth from ceremonial cannons, creating a colorful display.
Amid the festive atmosphere, the ship set sail gradually. It circled Port Santa, capturing the cheers and blessings of the people before venturing toward the distant sea.
As the navigator, Juan Oro guided the ship into a boundless azure sea with no discernible landmarks. They weaved between left and right turns, occasionally reversing direction.
Nearly an hour passed, and beneath the clear, bright sky, dense fog suddenly enveloped the ship.
Splash!
Within the fog's depths, waves surged like mountains. Any ship it touched would capsize or shatter.
The Governor of the Sea, the Maidens of the Sea, some sailors, and the two deputy hosts, participating in the sea sacrificial segment for the first time, were terror-stricken by the ominous scene, their faces paling.
For Juan Oro, a veteran of many sea sacrifices, it seemed like he was observing a child's plaything. He directed the sailors with no emotional fluctuations, guiding the ship along the only safe sea route through the thick fog and exaggerated waves.
After an unknown duration, the fog lifted, and the tidal waves miraculously subsided. An ocean resembling sapphires unfolded before Lumian's eyes.
The sea appeared limitless, but the distance and sky were gray, with only a hint of sunlight seeping through.
...

Port Santa, Solow Motel.
Lugano stood by the window, observing as the citizens formed celebratory teams, weaving through streets and alleys, spreading their joy.
Having already taken Ludwig to witness the Governor of the Sea's colorful flower boat ritual and participated in two spontaneous citizen-led celebrations, Lugano returned to the suite as teatime approached. There, he provided Ludwig with food he had purchased and prepared in advance.
I could still head out later. When the Governor of the Sea returns, another wave of celebrations will ensue. Unfortunately, I can't engage with the enthusiastic Feynapotter girls with such a child in tow... Lugano thought regretfully.
At that moment, a knock echoed on the door.
"Who is it?" Lugano, a seasoned bounty hunter, heightened his guard.
"It's me." A gentle voice emanated from outside the door.
Lugano recognized her as Rubió Paco's wife, Madame Giorgia.
She's here to see the boss? Has something happened to the Paco family again? Lugano glanced at Ludwig, who was eating earnestly, and quickly walked to the door and opened it.
Giorgia, not clad in her usual glamorous attire, wore a black dress akin to that of an old widowed matriarch.
Her long, disheveled brown hair was in disarray, and her thick azure eyes betrayed an unmistakable fear and panic.
"Where's Monsieur Louis Berry?" the lady inquired.
"He's participating in various celebrations for the sea prayer ritual," Lugano fabricated an excuse.
He observed the distressed Madame Giorgia and instinctively inquired with concern, "Did something happen?"
"H-h..." Giorgia stammered, panic and fear evident in her eyes. "I discovered the true identity of that humanoid lizard!"
That humanoid lizard? The one the boss killed? Amidst Lugano's confusion, Giorgia suddenly threw herself into his arms.
The fragrance permeated Lugano's senses, momentarily hindering him from immediately pushing the madam away.
Giorgia suppressed her voice but couldn't conceal her fear.
"That humanoid lizard was my husband, Rubió Paco!"
"Huh?" Lugano was both surprised and bewildered.
Giorgia gritted her teeth and explained, "The one you guys saw, it's fake!"
Fake? Someone impersonated Rubió Paco, and the real Rubió Paco had transformed into a humanoid lizard, killed by the boss? As this realization struck Lugano, his thoughts suddenly slowed

down. The surroundings seemed coated in a glass-like layer.
He instinctively struggled, but Giorgia held him tightly, interrupting him with various subtle actions.
Ludwig, engrossed in devouring a skewer of roasted octopuses at the dining table, appeared oblivious to the unfolding silent drama at the door.
In a suite diagonally across the corridor, Rubió Paco sat quietly in a recliner, wearing a faint smile.
He had orchestrated the humanoid lizard incident and hired Louis Berry to resolve it intentionally. Firstly, he aimed to confirm the other party's identity. Secondly, he wanted to leave a vulnerability in the Paco family's handling of weak monsters, ensuring others wouldn't suspect a Faceless's involvement to confuse the target.
However, he abandoned the plan to deal with Louis Berry and refrained from triggering the corresponding trap.
This decision wasn't due to uncertainty about the target's identity; the Mysteries aura on Lumian Lee's chest couldn't escape his notice. He was unlike others. Instead, he had a new plan.
The overall April Fool's operation might not align with Loki's personal objectives!
His current focus shifted to the young boy, Ludwig.
To him, a sealed demigod-level powerhouse was a gift from the Celestial Worthy!
No ritualistic target could be more suitable.
Hence, he hinted at the sea anomaly, simultaneously confusing Lumian Lee and allowing him to connect the concepts of sealing and theft, understanding what occurred during last year's prank.
He took the initiative to board the ship and head to the sea sacrifice grounds, enticing this formidable opponent away while another force restrained him.
Now, he was ready to execute a grand performance, captivating the attention of numerous Port Santa citizens!
...
The calm, gem-like sea held no waves. The four Maidens of the Sea engaged in a brief sacrificial dance, while sailors carried offerings —lambs, roosters, ox heads, and more—from the cabin, stacking them at the bow.
With the Ring of the Sea Queen in hand, Juan Oro approached the Governor of the Sea, awaiting the groom's gift for the proposed marriage.
Lumian, vigilant of everyone present, scanned his surroundings.
Any one of them could suddenly reveal themselves as Bard, Mad Lady, Ultraman, Loki, Hisoka, or a marionette.
The gentle, rhythmic dance concluded swiftly. Juan Oro produced

the peculiar golden ring, passing it to the incumbent Governor of the Sea, Simon Guiaro.
At that moment, a person emerged openly from the cabin.
A woman in a black nun's uniform and matching hat, her expression calm yet tinged with sadness.
The surrounding sailors paid her no heed, as if she were invisible.
Seeing this, Lumian's pupils dilated, then constricted.
It was the source of Derangement!
The humanoid Sealed Artifact lost by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church!
In an instant, Lumian comprehended two things.
The Death Navigators, transformed Governors of the Sea, had coincidentally appeared near the Flying Bird, stirring colossal waves.
The humanoid Sealed Artifact had unconsciously set out to sea, coincidentally choosing the same destination as him—Port Santa.
There was a purpose behind this!

Chapter 573: Bard

The woman in the black nun's attire felt Lumian's gaze, turning her head slightly and locking eyes with him.

Lumian's gaze met hers, filled with indescribable colors, and the figure in his line of sight vanished.

Simultaneously, Lumian recognized the insignificance of this occurrence. It didn't warrant further consideration.

Beside the incumbent Governor of the Sea, Juan Oro noticed the once calm azure sea undulating. In the gray sky, stars barely visible to the naked eye underwent changes, stirring an inexplicable throbbing and emotional shift within him.

An anomaly? Juan Oro couldn't determine if it was good or bad. Given the circumstances, any change was treated as an accident, potentially caused by a hidden enemy.

Without hesitation, he forcefully thrust the Ring of the Sea Queen into the hands of the incoming Governor of the Sea, Simon, growling, "Hurry up and marry the sea!"

In a moment of desperation, the president of the Fisheries Guild unintentionally failed to alter his voice to sound like Jorge. However, his vocal cords had changed, making him sound younger than usual.

Simon, taken aback by the shout, didn't notice Juan Oro's voice shift.

He raised his hand, clutching the Ring of the Sea Queen, and recited, "I espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion!" With that, he threw the unique golden ring. It trembled with light, its surface covered in a gentle glow.

As the Ring of the Sea Queen submerged, its glow intensified and expanded to the size of a baby before transforming into a cone of light, vanishing into the azure seawater.

In the next moment, Juan Oro, Lumian, and the rest heard a deafening boom.

Splash!

The sea boiled, unleashing huge waves that catapulted the colorful flower boat into the air. A destructive aura echoed in the surroundings.

Wh... The sea's fury! *How could this happen?* Juan Oro's pupils dilated in disbelief. He couldn't fathom that they had angered the sea again. It seemed like this year's sea prayer ritual had failed once more.

He had meticulously followed every step, witnessing the placement of the Ring of the Sea Queen on the dilapidated stone platform representing the ancestors. He personally retrieved and

guarded it with utmost vigilance. Everything went smoothly!
How could this be?
As the bridal boat teetered on the verge of capsizing, Juan Oro clenched his fists, and crystalline scales resembling starlight manifested on his body.
His eyes darkened, resembling resplendent stars emerging within.
He melded with the "sea."
The crashing sound abruptly ceased, and the majestic, terrifying azure waves froze in midair, as if held tightly by an unseen hand.
...
In Milo Village, within the cathedral-like Governor of the Sea's building.
The imposter Governor of the Sea, Miguel, lay in the servant's room. Suddenly, he sat up and leisurely rose from the bed, a self-satisfied smile playing on his face.
Standing before a glass window overlooking the weeds outside, he muttered to himself, It's almost time...
I wonder how Juan Oro will react when he discovers the sea sacrifice has failed again. Heh heh, this is payback for all the 'care' he's given me over the past year.
What's Loki up to? *Why the sudden deviation from the original plan?* Isn't he concerned about potential accidents?
Miguel—a key member of April Fool's, Bard—had previously disguised himself as the sailor, Iru, and boarded the ship, escaping with Mad Lady when he jumped into the sea.
Their plan over the course of the past year was devised last year. They had selected locals from Port Santa who resembled the unfortunate governor. After disrupting the sea sacrifice and returning ashore, they promptly killed one of their targets, allowing Bard to assume the guise.
Their confidence in Miguel—disguised by Bard—becoming the false Governor of the Sea stemmed from Ultraman taking charge of the matter.
To prevent potential rebellion from peripheral April Fool's members, Bard, a former Swindler, intentionally wrote Emperor Roselle's Secret Chronicles and handed them to Loki. The latter discreetly distributed them in Trier, creating the illusion of Bard's activity in Intis. This tactic prevented others from connecting Miguel—obediently residing in the Governor of the Sea's residence—to Bard.
Writing about Emperor Roselle's romantic past indeed amused Bard, and witnessing Juan Oro's reactions, including the lashing with a crutch before intimate encounters with his granddaughter and the wives and daughters of relevant personnel, greatly

satisfied Bard's mischievous tendencies.
However, pranks were secondary. Bard's main objective in assuming the disguise of the Governor of the Sea was clear:
He gained unrestricted access to the basement of the building, believed by Milo Village's inhabitants to be the sacrificial ground for their ancestors!
Despite being a fake Governor of the Sea under the watchful eyes of sea spawn in the house, he had free rein everywhere except the ring-making ritual grounds and the vigil room. Only those two areas were off-limits unless he crossed a line. Moreover, Ultraman confirmed that the basement of the Governor's residence held no value for the sea spawn. Except for two symbolic guards at the staircase, there were no monitors or protectors inside.
Villagers of Milo Village only visited occasionally, showing respect for the Governor of the Sea by not entering or leaving the building without permission.
This provided ample opportunities for Bard, the imposter Governor of the Sea.
Thinking about the expressions of Juan Oro and Lumian Lee when they witnessed the sea prayer ritual's failure again, Bard couldn't help but chuckle. He muttered in a mocking tone, You know the sea sacrifice, ring-making, and vigil happen once a year. Haven't you considered that the ancestral sacrificial ritual can only occur annually?
That dilapidated altar requires the slow accumulation of worshippers' spirituality. It takes almost twelve months to gather the necessary enchantment.
Over half a month before the basement gained serious attention, he had strategically placed an item related to one of the three pathways on the altar, openly siphoning the accumulated theft powers!
With this plan, Bard believed that, regardless of the success of the previous night's ring-making ritual, regardless of how closely Juan Oro and Lumian Lee guarded against the replacement of the Ring of the Sea Queen, it wouldn't possess the ability to steal power from the sea bottom.
Hence, the sea prayer ritual was destined to fail. The seal would further open, and the long-accumulated "volcano" inside would erupt!
Anyone attempting to stop it would perish!
Last year, the reason April Fool's took the risk of making Mad Lady a deputy host and deliberately replacing the Ring of the Sea Queen on the sacrificial ancestor's stone platform with another item arose because the theory that the high-level stealing power could

only be used once a year wasn't entirely confirmed. Although Ultraman could analyze and experiment in the basement, he refrained from doing so too frequently to avoid suspicion.
Following the sea prayer ritual failure last year and the subsequent monthly experiments over the past eleven months, Bard, Ultraman, and Mad Lady were now certain that they didn't need to go through the trouble of replacing the real Ring of the Sea Queen. Instead, they could preemptively take away the theft power. Thus, they sneered at Lumian Lee's efforts, unconcerned about his actions or the need for destructive measures to avoid detection by the Earth Mother Church.
Despite their confidence, they still had to maintain appearances, including seeking help from Lumian Lee.
Bard shifted his gaze, averting it to his left hand.
There were signs of a ring being worn there.
This was, in fact, the item carrying the key functions of the Ring of the Sea Queen!
...
Port Santa, Solow Motel, at the entrance of the fifth-floor suite.
"Hugging" Madame Giorgia, Lugano's thoughts faltered, as if the iron gears were covered in yellow rust or lacking lubricant.
W-what's... going on?
Am I... under attack?
No... I have to hurry... I have to... get rid... of this state...
Lugano attempted to push away the woman in his arms, only to realize she had become surprisingly heavy. Using her joints subtly, Madame Giorgia prevented him from raising his arms and legs. The movements resembled a lovers' playful interaction.
Coupled with his disjointed thoughts, even a Planter like Lugano couldn't break free from Giorgia's restraints.
Panicking, Lugano opened his mouth, about to call for help.
Just then, Giorgia lifted her head, pressing her red lips against his.
Lugano was momentarily taken aback.
In the adjacent room, Jenna, disguised as a female mercenary, held a mirror to "reflect" the situation in Lumian's living room through the glass and other items.
Seeing Lugano and Giorgia embracing and flirting, Jenna couldn't help but curse under her breath, "Dammit, can you even go into heat at a time like this? And in front of a child!"
Considering that Franca would be joined by members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Lumian tasked Jenna with secretly monitoring Lugano to figure out what was wrong with the interpreter.
As a former Showy Diva, Jenna had witnessed similar scenes and

even more restrictive ones. She couldn't fathom why they chose to display such affection at the door.

At that moment, Anthony Reid, standing beside her, looked at the mirror and frowned.

"It doesn't seem like they're making out. Their actions and expressions aren't typical of people engaged in such activities."

Their actions and expressions don't align with the typical behavior of people engaged in intimate moments?

Though Jenna had witnessed such scenes in the past, she hadn't delved into the intricacies of others' intimate interactions. Upon hearing Anthony's words, she promptly sided with the Spectator's perspective.

Anthony continued, "Lugano's body language indicates clear resistance. His current condition is highly abnormal."

Resisting, yet not breaking free... There's a lack of intense movements, even though Lugano is a Sequence 8 Beyonder with a strengthened physique. This situation is undeniably peculiar... *What kind of Beyonder powers could cause this?* Jenna swiftly sifted through the information about potential adversaries for this mission.

Most of it had been compiled by Franca, with a small section supplemented by Judgment and Madam Magician.

As these thoughts raced through Jenna's mind, a realization quickly dawned on her: Marionettist!

A Sequence 5 Marionettist from the Seer pathway!

According to Franca's description of Marionettists, these Beyonders could lurk in the shadows, silently transforming their targets into autonomous marionettes from a distance.

And Madam Magician's additional information included this: "A Marionettist manipulates a creature's Spirit Body Threads. A skilled Marionettist can establish initial control of the target's Spirit Body Threads in five to 10 seconds, slowing down thoughts, movements, and stiffening the body."

Lugano's current state perfectly matched the characteristics of a Marionettist's initial control over the Spirit Body Threads!

Jenna lowered her voice and said to Anthony, "Loki..."

The enemy with the codename Loki was none other than a Marionettist!

Anthony immediately grasped Jenna's conjecture and nodded affirmatively.

"No need to rush. It takes a Marionettist several minutes to completely transform the target into a marionette. We have a chance to rescue Lugano."

As per the information, forcibly taking Lugano away, pushing him beyond a certain limit, or triggering him could help him break free from the Spirit Body Threads or enhance his resistance to such manipulation.

Certainly, the most direct approach would be to locate Loki's true

form and launch a direct attack on the enemy, preventing him from concentrating on controlling Lugano's Spirit Body Threads.
Jenna caught Anthony's implication.
Don't hurry to rescue Lugano. Find Loki's true form while Loki hasn't detected us!
The two of them had posed as a couple and checked into Solow Motel's suite the previous night.
Once Loki was identified, dealing with a peculiar, insidious adversary with formidable abilities might be beyond their capacity. However, they could create a significant disturbance and "report" to the Fertility Order, responsible for local Beyonder matters. Lumian had already coordinated with Noelia in advance.
Jenna nodded and reached for the fluorescent powder, preparing to conceal herself.
But in the next moment, she abandoned the idea.
She recalled the information's warning: Marionettists can directly perceive the Spirit Body Threads of different creatures. Most invisibility effects wouldn't work on them.
Moreover, Loki was currently manipulating Spirit Body Threads.
How to locate Loki? Jenna pondered with a strong sense of urgency.
...
In the sealed waters, aboard the betrothal ship.
Lumian first witnessed the mountain-like azure waves surging, only to realize that they had frozen in the air, as if subjected to a sudden freeze. The surroundings emitted a violent aura, obliterating everything in its path.
The sea's fury? Lumian's heart skipped a beat.
Similarly, he couldn't fathom what had gone awry. It seemed that the Ring of the Sea Queen had only unlocked the first half of the seal and hadn't manifested the second half of its stealing effect.
Nevertheless, following the completion of the ring-making ritual, the ring was indeed placed on the dilapidated stone platform. Lumian and Juan Oro had retrieved it together.
Previously uncertain if the Ring of the Sea Queen had been swapped, Lumian now knew it hadn't. This was evident as the Ring of the Sea Queen had further opened the seal. A counterfeit ring, lacking the previous ritual, wouldn't exhibit a similar function.
Could it be that someone moved the Ring of the Sea Queen during the hour in the basement, preventing it from completing the eroding power's duration? Or perhaps the critical stone platform in the basement was destroyed in advance, hindering the completion of the ancestral ritual? Unlikely. How could the first scenario elude the attention of Juan Oro, me, and the sea spawn surveillance?

The second scenario shouldn't be inconspicuous. It would undoubtedly be discovered by the sea spawn... As Lumian's thoughts raced, he suddenly felt a slight erosion from the destructive aura surrounding him.
His mind instantly connected to something.
Vaguely, Lumian "saw" the dark-blue seabed, nearly pitch-black. He "saw" a peculiar object partially embedded in rocks and gravel.
The object was unnaturally massive, surpassing the Fertility Order's cloister and the Governor of the Sea's residence combined. It bore a silver-gray hue, with sleek lines resembling a colossal spindle missing its front segment. At that moment, the side of the object gleamed with a radiant starlight. Together, they appeared to form a circular, transparent door.
Through the door, Lumian "saw" a particular scene inside.
Silver-gray metal walls were densely covered with special holes, resembling hives.
In some nests, black foam bubbled as thin, bristle-covered Batings Black Insects crawled out. Some nests contained more than ten compartments, with a wrinkled Little Devil lying inside, seemingly deceased and disintegrating into various forms...
As this peculiar and horrifying scene etched into Lumian's mind, he snapped out of his stupor. He couldn't be bothered to ponder April Fool's actions. He swiftly deliberated on how to prevent the sealed object from going berserk and breaking free entirely.
The extracted power has yet to cause any harm...
It appears to be suppressed by Juan Oro at the expense of his life...
If I can seize this window of opportunity to steal the released power and distribute it to everyone with a sea bloodline, there's a chance of completing the sea sacrifice segment and allowing the sea prayer ritual to succeed...
Stealing...
In an instant, Lumian contemplated two solutions:
Firstly, he could immediately seek help from Mr. Fool, an expert in this area, with Termiboros as a precedent. Secondly, he could utilize the Lie earring, a mystical item that had gained the ability to steal others' powers on the stone platform meant to honor the ancestors.
Lumian swiftly discarded the first option, considering April Fool's involvement. With The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings backing them, seeking Mr. Fool's assistance might not yield a response. It could potentially be a time-consuming effort.
As for the second method, Lumian sensed a strong feeling of inevitability and an undeniable sense of coincidence.
Lie had recently acquired the ability to steal someone else's power

—and here it was proving beneficial in a critical moment!
Without the luxury of time for careful analysis, Lumian made a swift decision.
Put aside coincidences and inevitability for now. Resolving the current predicament was the most pragmatic approach!
He then retrieved the silver Lie earring from his pocket.
Typically, such items couldn't be brought onto the betrothal ship—they would surely be discovered by the sea spawn. However, this time, Juan Oro had communicated with the sea spawn in advance, stating that he and his assistant intended to pose as deputy hosts and board the ship to guard against any potential mishaps.
The sea spawn placed their trust in the president of the Fisheries Guild more than anyone else while the traitors were still at large. Their intelligence wasn't particularly high, and they were especially protective of the sea prayer ritual.
Clutching the Lie earring, Lumian extended his spirituality.
He immediately perceived the surrounding starlight and sensed their presence.
Lumian subconsciously extended his hand and twisted his wrist.
A plethora of starlight cascaded down, rushing toward the Lie earring and enveloping him.
At that moment, a person materialized in front of him. She wore a black nun's uniform, her face expressing profound sorrow.
She appeared like a colossal whale suddenly leaping out of the sea without warning.
It's her? The source of Derangement? Lumian finally recollected something he had forgotten.
There was indeed such a person on the ship!
In the next instant, he sensed the humanoid Sealed Artifact becoming unusually weighty, so heavy that the surrounding void slightly bent. It was so heavy that all the starlight surged toward her like the sea. The weight was so immense that the betrothal ship began to sink, and the nearby seawater was pushed aside.
Silently, Lumian witnessed the sea around him morphing into a translucent azure mountain peak, looming over them as they descended to the seabed. It resembled the walls of a deep well, and the well mouth, formed by these walls, grew more distant with each passing moment.
...
Four hours ago, at the edge of the foggy sea, Nolfi said to Charname, "You have to listen to me completely from now on. Otherwise, it will be very dangerous."
"Sure." Charname nodded. "But before that, we need to communicate openly."

A smile gradually spread across his face.
Batna, who stood beside Nolfi, asked curiously, "What communication?"
Charname produced a metal canister and looked at Nolfi.
"This is an agent that can make people speak the truth. I want to know if you have a secret collaborator. If so, who is it? Don't worry, it's not poison."
Charname unscrewed the lid and took a sip to demonstrate his sincerity.
Nolfi fell silent.
"If I don't understand the corresponding details, it'll be challenging for me to follow your instructions," Charname began to instigate. "We're already here. We could enter those waters at any moment and destroy the underwater palace before the sea prayer ritual. Are you truly willing to give up?"
Nolfi remained silent for a moment before accepting the metal canister and taking a big gulp.
Charname's heart ached as he withdrew the bottle and patiently waited for the medicine to take effect.

Chapter 575: "Handover"

After a while, Charname reached his limit. He stared at Nolfi and questioned, "Do you have any secret collaborators?"

Nolfi gently nodded and admitted, "Yes."

Batna and Charname anticipated this response, but it failed to dampen Charname's excitement.

"Who is it?"

Nolfi hesitated for a moment before revealing, "It's, it's Juan Oro!"

Juan Oro? The president of the Fisheries Guild? Batna was caught off guard.

Charname shared the sentiment.

Could the spy be the boss? Despite his critique, he pressed on, "Are you sure it's Juan Oro?"

While instructing Juan Oro to investigate the core members of the Fisheries Guild, Lumian, who had uncovered the Earth Mother Church's true motives, sought similar information from Noelia of the Fertility Order, which included Juan Oro, the president.

Official reports indicated that Juan Oro's health had been relatively stable. He had never faced serious illness or severe injury. Moreover, he hadn't displayed any signs of losing control of his lizard form.

In essence, there was no indication that he had been possessed by Ultraman, a transmigrator.

Naturally, a definitive judgment couldn't be made based solely on this information. After all, when the original bodies of many Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members met unfortunate fates, there were no witnesses.

Despite growing older, Juan Oro's personality remained relatively unchanged, sans the increasingly stubborn streak and a penchant for returning to the sea.

Crucially, if Juan Oro were Ultraman, many of April Fool's disruptive actions during the sea prayer ritual would be unnecessary. It could be executed in a simpler and more covert manner.

Considering these factors, Charname had previously concluded that Juan Oro wasn't a key member of April Fool's.

Nolfi pursed her lips and disclosed, "It's him. I met him six months ago in Port Rayak."

Rayak, located north of the Dariège mountain range, served as a port under the jurisdiction of the Riston Province in the Intis Republic.

"Met before?" Charname blurted out. "Your eyes can deceive you. What you perceive doesn't necessarily reflect reality."

Unable to hold back his desire to confide, he continued, "Just like now. The me you see isn't equivalent to the real me. The difference is quite significant."
"Are you suggesting that the Juan Oro I encountered was an imposter?" Nolfi expressed disbelief. "But, he also demonstrated the ability to control the waves!"
Charname chuckled.
"Many Fisheries Guild committee members possess such abilities. What if one of them impersonated Juan Oro?"
"But, but it's too similar..." Nolfi fell into self-doubt.
Charname spoke casually, "Based on the intel we gathered, Juan Oro hasn't left Port Santa for nearly a decade.
"He's the president of the Fisheries Guild. He frequents the association daily."
While this information was used to persuade Nolfi, it wasn't conclusive evidence. If Juan Oro were Ultraman, he could have enlisted Mad Lady's help to travel to Port Rayak and return in less than two hours.
Under such circumstances, hardly anyone would notice his brief absence.
Nolfi fell silent, pondering, and muttered, "Then, then who could it be?"
"How would I know?" Charname expressed his criticism.
Appearing slightly awkward, he shifted the conversation.
"What kind of collaboration did the imposter Juan Oro seek with you? Do you have any means to obliterate the underwater palace and put an end to the sea prayer ritual once and for all?"
Nolfi's body quivered, as if grappling with an innate urge.
After a brief pause, she struggled in response, "H-he'll help me cover my tracks and disregard my existence. He'll permit me to board a ship and infiltrate the sea sacrifice waters ahead of the Governor of the Sea's vessel and conceal myself.
"Then, as the Governor of the Sea unveils the Ring of the Sea Queen and utters the words of the marriage proposal, I'll deliver a line.
"My mother imparted that passage to me. It originated from her profound connection with the palace when she received the sea's blessing. Its—its purpose is to trigger a self-destruct sequence within the palace."
Nolfi's words flowed more effortlessly, signifying that she had given up on resisting.
"Self-destruction sequence? Are you certain? Do you comprehend that language from God knows where?" Charname wore an expression of skepticism.
"That's what my mother told me." Nolfi conveyed her lack of

understanding of the language's meaning.
Charname pressed on, "Does your mother comprehend that language?"
"She doesn't, but she grasps its significance. Can you fathom it? It's a form of spiritual communication," Nolfi defended her mother with determination.
"Deceiving through soul-level communication isn't out of the realm of possibility. Moreover, it's always simpler to dupe the illiterate," Charname muttered his internal grievances once again.
He furrowed his brow and inquired, "Did the imposter Juan Oro inform you that the sea prayer ritual failed last year?"
"No. If he had, I wouldn't have chartered a boat at Port Santa," Nolfi expressed her frustration on the matter.
Had she known from the beginning that last year's sea prayer ritual had faltered, she would have anticipated heightened vigilance at Port Santa this year. Those attempting to rent a boat for a sea journey would undoubtedly be on a watch list.
Charname wore a perplexed expression.
"Wouldn't that mean the imposter Juan Oro was expecting you to be apprehended by Lato Guiaro..."
Half a year ago, neither April Fool's nor anyone with ulterior motives in Port Santa had foreseen Lumian's arrival to investigate the sea prayer ritual. This suggested that Nolfi's original role wasn't designed to lure Lumian. It might have been part of April Fool's initial plan until they reconsidered, opting to exploit the great adventurer's investigations.
Under such circumstances, letting Nolfi be captured by Lato Guiaro was evidently not a mere oversight in April Fool's plan, unless that was their intention all along.
Is Nolfi being thrown into the mix to confuse the Fisheries Guild and sow suspicion among other committee members against Juan Oro? A rift between them would hinder their cooperation. But this strategy doesn't seem cunning enough...
Is it an attempt to divert the Earth Mother Church's attention from this year's sea prayer ritual and redirect it towards Nolfi?
Or... or...
Franca, posing as Charname, had a guess.
Or perhaps, Lato Guiaro is a member of April Fool's!
The moment Nolfi arrived at Port Santa and tried to rent a boat, she was apprehended. Not only does Lato Guiaro hold complete sway over this "collaborator," but he also offers corresponding protection... Could it be that when the sea prayer ritual is on the brink of commencing, he will feign a lapse in vigilance, allowing Nolfi to escape successfully and secure a boat?

With this speculation in mind, the more Franca considered Lato Guiaro, the more something felt awry.
Whether it was the intel provided by the Knight of Swords or information from the authorities, a consistent message emerged:
Lato Guiaro had slept in separate rooms from his wife many years ago!
For transmigrators, after taking over the original owner's body, their greatest apprehension was being exposed by those around them through various details. Among these people, the ones most likely to unveil their disguises were their deeply connected parents and spouses who shared the same bed. In particular, the latter were privy to many interaction habits unknown to others. In such circumstances, opting to sleep in separate rooms was evidently a form of self-protection for transmigrators.
Initially, Franca had a fleeting suspicion when she came across this information, but she promptly dismissed it. Firstly, it wasn't uncommon for a middle-aged man and his wife to have separate sleeping quarters. Lato Guiaro wasn't the sole Fisheries Guild committee member to adopt this practice. Secondly, Lato Guiaro had previously been forcibly controlled by the Knight of Swords and Lumian before being subjected to truth serum. During subsequent questioning, he displayed no indications of ties to April Fool's. He didn't even betray any signs of stifling laughter when discussing marrying the sea!
However, what if Lato Guiaro, who willingly transmitted Nolfi's information, had prepped in advance to elude the adventurer's detection and had cloaked a portion of his memories through Hypnosis?
The truth serum fundamentally heightened the inclination to share with others. Anything beyond the user's knowledge or comprehension remained veiled.
The pressing question now was: where did Lato Guiaro acquire Beyonders or items with similar capabilities through April Fool's channels?
Franca, increasingly convinced that Lato Guiaro was Ultraman, recalled a crucial detail: the current Governor of the Sea, Simon, belonged to the Guiaro family!
Previously, Juan Oro had heeded her advice to conduct a blood test on everyone, excluding Lumian, who boarded the ship. The aim was to confirm familial ties and unveil any outsiders attempting to infiltrate in disguise.
What if Simon Guiaro was Lato Guiaro in disguise?
This method would only affirm his identity!
...

On the betrothal ship, now resting on the seabed as if weighed down by a colossal boulder,
Simon Guiaro, positioned at the bow, appeared bewildered, his face a mixture of panic and confusion.
Yet, a faint curl formed at the corners of his mouth.
At that moment, the Governor of the Sea handover ritual from the previous night flashed in his mind.
Clad in a pristine blue suit, Simon Guiaro entered the hall, noting his predecessor, Governor of the Sea Miguel, clad in a retro white robe, observing him. Following the predetermined procedure, he uttered the prearranged words.
"I'll leave the sea to you."
"It's my honor," Simon Guiaro responded solemnly as he advanced toward the other party.
Miguel extended his right hand, and Simon Guiaro reached out for a handshake. This gesture symbolized the departure of the former Governor of the Sea and the commencement of Simon Guiaro's role as the present Governor of the Sea.
After the handshake, they passed each other by. As they turned their gazes in opposite directions, the corners of their lips subtly curled upwards.
Under the scrutiny of the numerous statues surrounding them, one advanced while the other exited the hall.

Chapter 576: Palace

Having transformed into Simon through a Seer pathway's Sealed Artifact, Lato Guiaro observed the illusory starlight surrounding them, akin to seawater caught in a vortex. It cascaded down, forming a massive funnel.

The origin of this vortex was the humanoid Sealed Artifact they had "abducted" from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church!

After the exposure of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's internal affairs and the consecutive deaths of Loki and I Know Someone, one resurrected at the cost of a precious opportunity, while the other met a permanent end. They adjusted their initial sea sacrifice plan and activated a backup strategy to counter potential interference from the Research Society.

According to the revived Loki's warning, Hela, the society's vice president, had likely ascended to Sequence 4, reaching demigod status, and switched from the Death pathway to the Evernight pathway. Depending solely on Ultraman, Bard, and Mad Lady, their intricate plans would crumble before absolute strength.

Of course, they were confident if it were just Hela alone. Confidence wavered when considering President Gandalf, an enigma, and the other vice presidents, alongside the troublesome society members. Dealing with them now seemed an insurmountable challenge.

Starlight surged, revealing a sorrowful woman in black nun's attire to everyone on the ship. Her presence felt magnetic, as if attempting to absorb everything around her.

It was akin to an unusually heavy iron ball falling from the center of a taut fishing net, dragging objects down and pulling the surrounding net with it. In these circumstances, previously still items naturally slipped away.

The most impacted was Juan Oro, with a potent sea bloodline and formidable sea power. Resisting the sea's fury, he felt a spatial inversion, as if his front and back had switched to up and down. Like a lost person above an abyss, he involuntarily "fell" to the bottom at an accelerated speed, where the woman in black nun's attire awaited.

The deputy hosts, apart from Lumian, felt an unseen force tugging at them. Struggling, they staggered towards the humanoid Sealed Artifact. The sea's power within them wavered, propelling them to the surface, revealing sparkling starry scales that hinted at losing control.

The Maidens of the Sea and the sailors on the ship struggled against the terrifying suction force, swaying on the spot. Some

experienced their skin smoothing, others felt scales emerging in their flesh, and a few shifted their feet intermittently.
Lumian, though relatively unscathed, exerted considerable strength to resist the relentless pull.
As an Ascetic, he vaguely sensed the river of fate for everyone present surging toward the humanoid Sealed Artifact. Future tributaries narrowed and converged, leading inevitably to one possibility—death.
In that moment, Lumian grasped why the humanoid Sealed Artifact could use words to curse someone to death.
Lato Guiaro reached out, gripping the shipboard to resist the invisible pull from the woman.
His gaze scanned the people on the ship, then returned to the sea's depths.
The ship descended, surrounded by a translucent wall of azure seawater. Sea creatures swam within, seemingly oblivious to the anomaly. In the distance, the spindle-shaped silver-gray object at the sea bottom, its tip embedded in rocks, came into view.
Lato Guiaro suppressed any sign of a smile.
He was nearing his destination.
The fools from the Fisheries Guild and the oblivious Earth Mother Church might never comprehend what lay sealed at the bottom of the sea here.
It wasn't a so-called "palace" but a spaceship!
A spacecraft that infiltrated during the Fourth Epoch!
It boasted a sci-fi dimension, housing advanced technology entwined with mystical Beyonder elements, forming the core of the entire spaceship.
A locator, a petri dish, a breeding box, a key component of a Stargate—a place where a Beyonder object slumbered.
The Ring of the Sea Queen, crafted by the sea spawn, served as the spacecraft's key. Only when the external seal weakened annually could it activate the spacecraft's internal power, merging the two to crack the core seal!
Lato Guiaro's gaze grew greedier as he stared at the faintly discernible silver-
gray behemoth.
His aim extended beyond temporary authority—to become the true Governor of the Sea and the spaceship's owner.
This would grant him immense power and the ability to accomplish unimaginable feats using the spaceship.
The azure sea, tinged with a hint of green, encircled the ship as if respectfully escorting them into the palace of the sea.
Seeing the sea's fury interrupted by the woman's sudden

appearance, making her the most perilous element, Juan Oro wasted no time deepening his connection with the sea.
At that moment, he temporarily became the Governor of the Sea.
He resisted the terrifying suction force.
Abruptly, the humanoid Sealed Artifact "departed" from the ship, entering an empty darkness.
Resplendent stars flickered above, below, and to her left. Ahead stood Juan Oro, covered in starlight scales, deep-eyed, and with completely white hair.
Juan Oro raised his right hand, swiping his finger.
The "stars" plummeted with fiery tails, stirring up waves.
On the betrothal ship, everyone lost the momentum to rush to the same place. However, the power they used to resist the pull couldn't be withdrawn, causing them to fall in the opposite direction.
Lato Guiaro feigned a similar state, crashing into the bow of the ship.
Seeing the silver-gray behemoth approaching, his heart leaped with joy. He was about to recite a phrase he didn't comprehend but understood its purpose.
It was a coded order to completely open the spaceship's door and establish an energy passageway, allowing him to enter under protection!
April Fool's had been established for several years. Lato Guiaro's decision to target the sea prayer ritual last year was influenced by the resolution of other voices from the Governor of the Sea, Maidens of the Sea, and certain sea spawn. This allowed them to understand the significance of the three crucial passages.
"I espouse thee, O sea..." was one of the passages, its true meaning being to inject energy into the created key and enter a password. Lato Guiaro was about to recite the second paragraph, which served as an order to initiate the spaceship.
Initially, he and Bard planned to deceive the foolish Nolfi, tricking her into reciting the words to avoid danger. Once the spaceship activated and left these waters, the sea prayer ritual would naturally conclude. There wouldn't be any follow-up. Whether it involved self-destruction or not, it wasn't a concern for her; she had achieved her essential goal.
However, the situation changed drastically, especially when the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society learned about the sea prayer ritual. Ultraman and Bard modified their plans, roping in external aid and reducing Nolfi's role. Eventually, she became bait to lead troublemakers, represented by Lumian Lee and Hidden Blade.

Lato Guiaro opened his mouth and muttered the words.
As he finished speaking, he looked expectantly at the spaceship at the sea bottom.
But nothing happened!
How is this possible? Lato Guiaro's heart tightened, feeling a sudden sense of danger.
With a jolt, he saw everything disintegrate like a soap bubble, vanishing.
Lumian, transformed into Brian, had arrived near him at some point.
A dream!
He had been dreaming since Juan Oro pulled the humanoid Sealed Artifact into the Cosmic Void!
Hela! This name flashed through Lato Guiaro's mind.
He had paid attention to whether there were other ships lurking around!
As these thoughts raced through his mind, formless hands appeared around Lato Guiaro, pushing Lumian away.
Then, he saw a sailboat, clearly abandoned by time, outlined in the cavity surrounded by seawater beside the betrothal ship. Shadows clung to its canvas, and corpses stood on the observatory. The deck was littered with decaying or boneless undead creatures.
At the bow of the ship, a woman dressed as a black widow stood silently.
Hela!
...
Less than four hours ago, Franca, posing as Charname, signaled Nolfi and Batna to wait for further arrangements. Returning to the cabin, she entered the captain's cabin and addressed Hela, standing by the window.
"I've roughly guessed who Ultraman is, but I can't be sure."
"I guessed as much," Hela replied, having overheard Franca and Nolfi's conversation.
Franca gritted her teeth and said, "If it's really Lato Guiaro, there will definitely be variables on the ship. I have to quickly summon Lumian's messenger and inform him of our guess."
"Let's wait a little longer and time it well. We'll send the message when the deputy hosts leave the Governor of the Sea's residence but prior to boarding the ship," Hela advised.
Franca confirmed succinctly, "Got it."
She observed Hela, with her light-blond hair naturally cascading over her shoulders, and her dark eyes seemingly darker as she meticulously engraved patterns and arranged items on the captain's cabin desk. With curiosity, she promptly inquired,

"What's this for?"
"Setting up a ritual to completely conceal the entire ship, preventing anyone from discovering it. It's impossible for me to do this on my own. I can only achieve it through a deity's help. And She should be very willing to help."
Without hesitation, Hela took off the pure silver ring embedded with a black diamond from her right hand and placed it in the center of the altar.
...
On the betrothal ship, Lumian scrutinized Lato Guiaro, his body quivering with excitement.
He couldn't comprehend how the other party had thwarted the sea prayer ritual once again. After all, he had been vigilantly observing this "old friend" of his and hadn't witnessed any ring-switching.
Nonetheless, it didn't matter. A well-devised plan was not a fragile creation that crumbled with the slightest mistake. It had to allow for enough margin for error!
Similarly, Lato Guiaro couldn't fathom how Hela and the ship had approached without triggering his detection.
But it didn't matter. If they hadn't prepared for the interference of the Curly-
Haired Baboons Research Society and Hela, they wouldn't have taken action this time.
Lato Guiaro's eyes suddenly darkened, and specks of starlight illuminated.
The surrounding azure seawater froze once more.
Here, he surpassed the old-timer, Juan Oro. He had long amassed the power to temporarily become the Governor of the Sea!
In the upcoming period, he would ascend to become the god of these waters!

Chapter 577: Same Thoughts

On the flower ship, Lato Guiaro extended his arms, and sunlight erupted from his body.

The sky dimmed, and the sea approached nothingness. Illusory stars emerged among them, expanding like distant suns.

In the next moment, Lato Guiaro swiftly spoke a few words in ancient Hermes with a grave expression, "God says entering dreams is ineffective!"

With the reinforcement of the sea's power, he neared the status of a Sequence 4 demigod. This allowed him to employ the Notary's "God says" ability more precisely, diminishing Hela's capacity to compel people into entering dreams.

Without this intervention, if Hela used her ability to forcefully restrain him without guiding him into an easily interruptible dream to gather information, breaking free from such a demigod's dream would prove challenging in a short time. He would become like a feral dog under anesthesia, at Lumian Lee's mercy.

The choice of "entering dreams is ineffective" over "sleeping is ineffective" was deliberate. The former was more specific and avoided potential ambiguity related to various abilities. Additionally, the Evernight pathway's induced slumber originated from being forcefully drawn into a dream, not the other way around. Essentially, it was a dream, not sleep.

As Lato Guiaro pronounced the ancient Hermes phrase "entering dreams is ineffective," his body still felt as weighty as the humanoid Sealed Artifact, though not as exaggerated.

This stirred massive waves in the surrounding seawater, attempting to fill the void.

The sailboat manipulated by the undead creatures visibly swayed, nearly capsizing, severely impeding Hela's further movements.

Immediately after, Lato Guiaro reclined even further. A miniature, bright sun manifested in his eyes.

Simultaneously, the ethereal sky and the stars emerging from the sea emitted light of varying intensities. They interweaved, crafting a splendid and pure blazing pillar of light.

The majestic pillar of light descended, enveloping the front half of the sailboat, where Hela stood. It melted the undead creatures there as if they had evaporated, leaving no trace of darkness.

Hela became engulfed by the pillar of light.

This was the Light of Holiness, an ability of a Sequence 5 Priest of the Light of the Sun pathway. Despite not consuming a corresponding Sequence 4 potion and lacking demigod-level abilities after becoming the temporary Governor of the Sea, Lato

Guiaro could elevate his acquired abilities to near Sequence 4.
Moreover, the Light of Holiness had undergone a mutation. It no longer emanated from a single sun. All the stars in the Cosmic Void contributed to its power. Coupled with the uniqueness of these waters, while not as potent as the Sequence 4 Flaring Sun of this pathway in purifying and destroying impure entities, its attack range and area of influence had significantly expanded.
Having transmigrated into a Child of the Sea and possessing substantial boons, Lato Guiaro had carefully considered the Sun pathway potion, believing it posed no risks and might integrate with his bloodline and original abilities, bringing about remarkable changes.
The outcome aligned with his expectations.
Suddenly, Lato Guiaro pivoted.
In the space behind him, Lumian's figure swiftly materialized.
He intended to exploit Lato Guiaro's engagement with Hela to "teleport" closer, followed by a Spell of Harrumph.
Gone from his eyes was any suppressed violence or madness. There was no fear whatsoever, as if he didn't concern himself with the consequences of failing to assail the Governor of the Sea at close range.
In Lato Guiaro's dark and profound eyes, resplendent stars reflected. Before Lumian could utter the harrumph, he plunged into the void, disappearing beneath the vast and distant cosmos.
Lato Guiaro withdrew his gaze and focused on the sailboat illuminated by the residual light.
He found an adversary like Lumian Lee repulsive. It wasn't that he couldn't be forcibly eliminated, but doing so might only exacerbate matters. He could potentially incur the indiscriminate wrath of a high-ranking individual.
His decision was to leverage the authority of the Governor of the Sea to banish his foe into a self-created Cosmic Void, leaving him disoriented and unable to find an exit for the time being.
Once he assumed control of the spaceship and became the true Governor of the Sea, he planned to return and calmly resolve the issue.
At that precise moment, Juan Oro, entangled in a battle with the humanoid Sealed Artifact in his Cosmic Void, suddenly detected an anomaly.
His strength rapidly waned, and his dominion over the sea gradually diminished!
It seemed like his temporary authority as Governor of the Sea was being usurped.
In the blink of an eye, the tidal wave capable of shattering ships

vanished from the Cosmic Void, followed by the illusory cosmos itself.
Juan Oro "reappeared" on the ship once more and "saw" the azure sea around him, towering like a mountain peak. He "saw" Simon Guiaro, closely linked to the sea.
"It's you!" His roar coincided with an involuntary bend, as if an invisible force pressed him down to the floor.
The humanoid Sealed Artifact had also returned, reinstating a formidable weight.
Lato Guiaro gazed at her, his face covered in scales tinged with starlight. Then, he pointed at Hela's ship and spoke in a fluent language, "¥%...&*"
He didn't comprehend the exact meaning of the sentence, but he understood that it could prompt the other party to attack a designated target.
Although he harbored no fear of Hela in these waters, he remained vigilant of Gandalf and others who might be on the ship. Therefore, he had to give his utmost effort.
The humanoid Sealed Artifact's sorrow dissipated slightly, and it nodded blankly.
Her body pivoted towards the sailboat, which bobbed in the "underwater waves."
In an instant, Lato Guiaro bent down and grasped his throat.
Waa!
He ejected a slender, sticky blob of flesh.
The flesh contorted and writhed, swiftly taking on a human form.
Lato Guiaro promptly straightened up and seized the moment to command,
"Mad Lady, open the passageway to the spaceship!"
He wasn't concerned that Mad Lady might usurp the position of the Governor of the Sea and become the owner of the spaceship because she lacked the sea bloodline.
In the Cosmic Void crafted by Lato Guiaro, Lumian showed no urgency to find an exit or ascertain his coordinates. He simply "teleported" out.
He clasped his throat.
Waa!
He ejected a slender, sticky blob of flesh.
The flesh contorted and writhed, swiftly taking on a human form.
...
Solow Motel, adjacent to Lumian's suite.
Recalling that Invisibility and Shadow Concealment were futile against Marionettists, Jenna pondered ways to locate Loki's true form.

Drawing on information from the Major Arcana card holders, she knew a Marionettist had to be within five meters of a target to transform individuals into marionettes. In other words, Loki was undoubtedly within a five-meter radius of Lugano.
Dammit, it's all walls. My sight is blocked. Otherwise, spotting Loki would be easier. At this hour, most guests are away, celebrating the sea prayer ritual...
Walls... If there are no walls...
An idea struck Jenna.
She glanced at Anthony and blurted out, "Did you bring enough money?"
"What money?" In a rare instance, Anthony couldn't decipher Jenna's true thoughts.
Only then did Jenna realize her words had been too abrupt.
"Money to compensate the motel owner.
"I plan to blow up the opposite side, diagonally opposite, and the rooms below. We confirmed they're empty. If anyone's there, it's Loki or his marionette!
"I'll place the detonators here. They affect rooms within a seven-meter radius. Lugano will likely be injured, but with the lady as a shield and being a Doctor, he can handle it.
"Right, the explosion will attract the Fertility Order's combat nuns!"
Jenna's train of thought gradually flowed smoothly as she spoke.
Are you a Hunter or a Demoness? Have you been influenced by Lumian... Anthony mused inwardly. "Do it. Time is running out. Lumian will cover the compensation; he's loaded."
Jenna hurriedly searched her backpack for detonators. Simultaneously, she noticed Anthony setting up a simple altar.
Her heart stirred as she asked, "Do you wish to contact Madam Justice, Madam Judgment, or Madam Magician?"
"Either one works," Anthony said seriously as he prepared for the ritual. "Although Madam Magician won't appear until the end to prevent Loki and his backer from noticing, she mentioned that at least two Major Arcana cards will arrive early and provide assistance at critical moments."
"Got it." Jenna had been uncertain about when to reach out for help and inform their Major Arcana cardholders, so she had been contemplating handling it herself.
Given Anthony's readiness to risk the disapproval of the Major Arcana cardholders, Jenna was naturally inclined to opt for the safest choice.
As Jenna stacked the detonators and other explosives near the adjacent door, Anthony Reid erected a spiritual barrier and summoned Madam Magician's messenger, briefing her on Loki's

appearance.
Then, he swiftly took cover in the bathroom attached to the master bedroom, about six to seven meters away from the impending explosion.
Boom!
A fierce explosion tore through the fifth floor of Sauron Motel. Glass shattered, debris scattered, and crimson flames engulfed the surroundings.

Chapter 578: Marionettes

Amidst the thunderous explosion, the partition separating the two suites and the one facing the corridor crumbled simultaneously, wreaking havoc on nearby furniture, the ceiling above, the floor beneath their feet, and the rooms opposite, swiftly enveloping them in a surging inferno.

Jenna hadn't utilized all the explosives; otherwise, the entire fifth and fourth floors of Solow Motel would have collapsed in unison. Nevertheless, a section of the roof gave way, and the floor was strewn in chaos. The epicenter of the blast unveiled the room below.

As the walls of the adjacent rooms succumbed to the onslaught, the bricks and wood propelled by the shockwave slammed into Giorgia, causing her back to buckle, and her head to split open, unleashing a flow of vivid red blood. Lugano snapped out of his intermittent thoughts and bodily stiffness, regaining his composure.

Subsequently, he experienced searing pain as the violent shockwave, mixed with flames and debris, hurled him through the air.

Had it not been for Giorgia shielding him and with his robust Planter's physique, he likely would have faced severe injuries, teetering on the brink of death. Limbs could have been severed, or vital points struck. Despite this, he ended up a battered mess, with a few bones broken, nearly succumbing to unconsciousness.

Ludwig had sought refuge under the dining table at some point—along with his food. With the advantage of distance and the makeshift "shield," he only bore the impact of the collapsed table.

Simultaneously, Jenna and Anthony burst out of the master bedroom washroom in their suite, their gazes fixed on the adjacent rooms where walls had crumbled, filling the air with swirling dust.

They vaguely discerned a figure.

The figure, bearing a striking resemblance to Rubió Paco, stood beside the upturned recliner.

Loki! Jenna wasted no time. She condensed a dark, illusory flame and sent it hurtling towards her target.

Behind her, Anthony Reid's eyes took on a golden tint, pupils dilating. He was poised to lock onto Loki, ready to unleash Frenzy—a technique that would plunge Loki into an emotionally and psychologically triggered state, rendering him incapable of rational thought and effective response.

Just as Anthony and Jenna prepared to strike, their vision

darkened, and Loki vanished.
They found themselves in a void, no blue sky or white clouds above, no solid ground below—just darkness embellished with a myriad of stars.
Cosmic Void!
This semi-real, semi-false illusion was a creation achievable by a Child of the Sea at a certain level.
In the void, Jenna and Anthony beheld a widowed woman in a black bonnet with subtle wrinkles in front of them.
Martha!
The Paco family's matriarch, now a marionette under Loki's control, was hidden in the room where Loki manipulated the Spirit Body Threads.
With sufficient preparation time, how could Loki not perform with his marionettes? He had two puppets with Beyonder powers, and this was one of them. Another remained concealed, with the last slot reserved for specific situations, adaptable at will. It could be switched once an enemy was under control.
When Loki posed as Rubió Paco, bringing Madam Martha to meet the Governor of the Sea, the family's matriarch was already a marionette. Thus, he had to ensure she stayed within his control range.
Lugano discerned Madam Martha's severe injuries primarily because a marionette was essentially comparable to a lifeless entity. A Marionettist's manipulation of her Spirit Body Threads allowed her to execute various actions, mimicking living characteristics. To a Sequence 8 Doctor, this appeared as grave injuries.
Had Lumian not infrequently observed others' luck without forming a habit, he would have realized that Madam Martha's fate was off. It was eerily still, resembling death.
Martha, a subtle smile on her face, lifted her right hand, a spectral green light coalescing at her fingertips.
The radiance morphed into a beam that streaked towards Jenna.
Having heard Lumian explain the sea bloodline's abilities, Jenna, at the sight of the spectral green light, rolled out of the Cosmic Void. Anthony followed suit. He refrained from using Frenzy on Martha since a marionette, essentially dead, wouldn't succumb to frenzy.
In the next moment, they both felt a weightiness, plummeting swiftly through the empty cosmos. They experienced the weightlessness Franca occasionally mentioned.
In the blink of an eye, Jenna and Anthony landed on the ground and steadied themselves, yet Martha was nowhere to be seen. The

empty cosmos was shattering inch by inch.
They were still in Solow Motel, but they had descended from the fifth floor to the fourth.
This was because the mid- to low-level Cosmic Void resembled more of an illusion. There would be a barrier akin to a wall of spirituality around them. After falling into it, their bodies remained in reality. As they rolled and dodged, Martha nudged them forcefully with her formless power, causing them to plunge into the floor cavity created by the explosives.
Jenna didn't hesitate. She sprinted up the wall, seized a crack, and flipped back to the fifth floor where the explosion had occurred.
She saw Lugano tending to his injuries, and Loki and Madam Martha were absent from the room diagonally opposite.
Ludwig, who had hidden under the dining table, had vanished as well!
On Aquina Street, amid a lively folk celebration, Loki, having transformed into an inconspicuous passerby, carried Ludwig, who had "fallen asleep," through the crowd.
His other marionette, a Soul Assurer of the Evernight pathway, stayed concealed on the opposite side of Lumian's suite, ready to exert influence on the target.
Initially, Loki had dispatched his temporary marionette, Giorgia, to handle Lugano. He had manipulated the Doctor's Spirit Body Threads but refrained from deploying his more potent marionettes. It wasn't due to fear of alerting Ludwig, but rather a concern that an unseen adversary might be lurking in the shadows. After all, several lodgers in the motel hadn't left for the sea prayer ritual celebrations. A couple had returned before lunchtime next door, almost synchronizing with the target.
Moreover, a Marionettist's advancement ritual demanded a grand performance—a splendid and profound drama. Silent, unnoticed assassinations lacking a sufficient audience failed to meet the requirements.
Therefore, Loki intentionally singled out Lugano first. If there were no other foes lurking, it was akin to switching marionettes. If there were, he could draw them all to him and clandestinely manipulate the target with the other marionette nearby.
Aware that it was a sealed demigod, Loki knew its strength might be limited, but its essence remained unchanged. It was impervious to many influences. However, he believed the Evernight pathway's forced sleep would still be effective. Since this sealed demigod could experience exhaustion, hunger, and the need for rest, food, and sleep like a true child, it implied that the seal had impacted corresponding characteristics, making him akin to an ordinary

person in those aspects. At most, he would awaken faster and require less rest time.
A few seconds would be ample time for Loki to relocate and conceal himself with the target before attempting to manipulate the other party's Spirit Body Threads.
His two marionettes would act independently, confusing both enemies and the Earth Mother Church clergyman rushing over. They would lead them on a chase spanning about 100 to 200 meters, completing the corresponding performance.
As the time approached, the enemies would pinpoint his hiding spot through the marionettes' trajectory, joyfully anticipating an encounter. However, what awaited them would be a demigod-level marionette, leading to a terrifying and grim outcome.
Under the watchful eyes of the surrounding citizens, the magnificent play would conclude. Loki could consume the potion and ascend to Sequence 4, becoming a Bizarro Sorcerer!
...
On the betrothal ship, within Lato Guiaro's Cosmic Void.
This was fundamentally different from lower-middle-level abilities. It was both an illusory realm and an alternate space that could cause people to lose themselves and become abnormally fragile. It was akin to the Bottle of Fiction augmented with hallucinations.
The sticky blob of flesh Lumian had expelled squirmed rapidly, stretching and expanding into a discernible figure.
Cloaked in blood-red fabric with a matching hood obscuring its face in shadows, the figure revealed itself as none other than Mr. K of the Aurora Order.
To counter April Fool's machinations, Lumian had chosen the strategy of overwhelming force. He accomplished this with overt and imposing power, complemented by meticulous arrangements.
This plan allowed for a fair margin of error. Even if Lumian made a miscalculation, as long as April Fool's didn't have Angel-level helpers or three or more Saints, he could salvage the situation by retaining at least one or two key members.
To enhance their odds, Franca extended invitations to Hela and Gandalf. The Fertility Order also notified the higher-ups, ensuring the presence of a Saint overseeing Port Santa during the sea prayer ritual. The Tarot Club had two Major Arcana card holders positioned nearby. When April Fool's key members felt secure, Madam Magician, the Angel of Stars, would cross a long distance and descend as they prepared to depart!
For extra precaution, Lumian utilized Mr. K's finger to get him to Port Santa. Morphing with the Rose Bishop's power, he turned into

a fleshy blob, and was concealed in Lumian's stomach to infiltrate the betrothal ship.
Mr. K glanced up, his eyes taking on an otherworldly illusion, as if concealing hidden doors.
Swiftly scanning the Cosmic Void, he identified an escape route.
"Follow me," he said to Lumian in a hoarse voice.
Nodding, Lumian reached into the Traveler's Bag, extracting the Flog boxing gloves and preparing to don them.
If you guys still have a backup plan or if a few powerhouses don't appear in time, I'll draw the attention of the evil gods and create chaos. We'll all face the danger together. Early exits? Forget about it!

Chapter 579: Energy Passage

On the betrothal boat, the humanoid Sealed Artifact ascended, her form suspended in the air. Striding through the atmosphere, she advanced toward the sailboat.

With the weight akin to a massive stone sphere, she manipulated the surrounding space, causing the target ship to shift automatically. The two factions drew near.

Concurrently, the vacant eyes of the humanoid Sealed Artifact, adorned in a black nun's attire, suddenly sparked with madness and chaos. Minute blood vessels protruded from the whites of its eyes, swiftly converging.

Accompanying her "affliction," the Maidens of the Sea, deputy hosts, and sailors on the betrothal ship, unaware of what transpired, stood motionless. Their expressions blank, eyes vacant, they succumbed to the same state as the humanoid Sealed Artifact.

In that moment, within the lingering Light of Holiness on the sailboat, which had traversed the void and approached the origin of Derangement, a light abruptly vanished, swallowed by the profound darkness.

In the darkness, a tranquil voice resonated, as if reciting a beautiful poem.

The expression of the humanoid Sealed Artifact softened significantly. The chaos and madness in her eyes dissipated, and her steps slowed.

The other individuals on the betrothal ship also entered a state of tranquility and drowsiness. Juan Oro felt the intangible force suppressing his body instantly dissipate.

Straightening up abruptly, he glared angrily at Simon Guiaro, positioned at the bow of the ship.

The president of the Fisheries Guild had a rough idea of the other party's identity. After all, not many comprehended the entire sea prayer ritual and knew the intricacies of the Ring of the Sea Queen. Combined with the fact that he hailed from the same family as Simon Guiaro, there was only one answer: Lato Guiaro!

"You traitor!" Even the distant chanting from the darkness couldn't pacify Juan Oro's anger. Although no longer the temporary Governor of the Sea, he still possessed considerable strength and could be deemed formidable at sea.

Splash!

The seawater at the bottom of the betrothal ship surged, part of it threatening to hurl everyone back to the surface, while others formed into towering peaks and crashed down on Lato Guiaro, masquerading as Simon Guiaro.

Lato abruptly pivoted, fixing his gaze on Juan Oro.
The azure "peak" poised to strike him froze in midair, its descent arrested. The water's attempt to push the betrothal ship out of this area also ceased its endeavors.
Reflected in Lato Guiaro's eyes was the figure of Juan Oro. The corners of his mouth curled up slightly as he stated a fact in a composed tone, "I am now the Governor of the Sea."
"Your abilities, especially those affecting these waters, are completely suppressed by me. They are useless!
The incantation from the darkness targeted the humanoid Sealed Artifact. Everything else was secondary. As the interim Governor of the Sea, Lato Guiaro couldn't help but be affected. However, thanks to the feedback from the sea and the sharing of the burden, it didn't reach a profound level. He only became more tranquil, devoid of the desire for intense combat and direct killing.
Compared to Juan Oro, he was more concerned about whether Gandalf was on the sailboat besides Hela. He was more concerned about whether Mad Lady had opened the spaceship's passageway in time.
Juan Oro's heart sank as he witnessed the azure wave suspended in midair and Lato Guiaro, seemingly indifferent to him.
At that moment, Lato turned to Mad Lady, who had reverted to her human form, and addressed his companion, clad in an unusually flamboyant blood-
colored dress,
"Hurry up."
Mad Lady wasn't particularly tall, standing at over 1.6 meters. Her dark-blond hair was disheveled, influenced by the heaviness effect. None of it fluttered wantonly, pointing towards the seabed.
Her face concealed by pure flesh, making it challenging to discern her original appearance. She wore a ring on each hand.
On her left hand, there was a rose-gold ring embedded with a gem resembling crimson blood, and on her right, a simple, pure silver ring.
Mad Lady responded to Lato Guiaro with a smile, "So there are times when you're anxious."
Only then did she cast her gaze at the silver-gray behemoth embedded in the seabed not far away.
This lunatic... Lato Guiaro cursed inwardly.
I Know Someone had an extremely nasty personality and subsequently succumbed to mental illness due to other reasons and was admitted to an asylum, but in contrast, Mad Lady had displayed an abnormal state of mind from the very beginning. In the past, she relied on I Know Someone's regular treatment to

barely maintain her rationality, but now, she was becoming more and more insane.
Lato Guiaro took a deep breath, focusing on the peculiar sounds emanating from within the spaceship, resisting the distant chants echoing in the darkness.
Swiftly regaining his will to fight, he redirected his gaze to the sailboat, raising his right arm.
Upon witnessing this, Juan Oro's sense of despair deepened.
The white-haired old man clenched his fist, slamming it against his chest.
With a snap, his sternum broke, and his flesh tore open, releasing a torrent of blood that painted his body and the betrothal ship's deck red.
As life ebbed away, Juan Oro's white hair defied the heaviness effect, floating upwards.
His steps grew burdensome, each movement pressing down like a mountain on the ground.
Just as Lato Guiaro was poised to unleash the surrounding seawater, submerging the sailboat, he suddenly realized that the sea wasn't as obedient as before.
His Governor of the Sea position teetered on the brink of collapse.
Lato Guiaro turned his head once more, narrowing his eyes at Juan Oro, now covered in blood.
"Traitor, the sea will punish you!" Juan Oro's dark-green eyes focused, emitting a beam of blue light.
Accompanying this attack, he also intensified Lato Guiaro's heaviness, rendering him unable to move normally.
Two beams struck Lato Guiaro simultaneously, penetrating him and sinking into the sea.
Lato Guiaro's aura weakened slightly, but he wasn't as severely injured as Juan Oro believed.
Sunlight burst forth from the April Fool key member who used "Ultraman" as his code name, eradicating the residual corrosive powers and altering his body structure.
He lifted his chin slightly and uttered three words with strange pronunciations.
"%%&("
This was also the language employed to activate the spaceship. The implication was likely akin to granting access, equivalent to obtaining a certain amount of Governor of the Sea power without "melding" with the sea after opening a crack in the seal. Lato Guiaro's usage now was to help him seize all authority back from Juan Oro.
Hmph, foolish fellow, a group of fools. They hadn't studied the

sounds heard during every sea sacrifice after so many years. They guarded the treasure but failed to excavate it!
Sacrificing your life? Sacrificing yourself?
It's meaningless!
Brains and strength are the foundation!
Juan Oro, still bleeding from his chest, was surprised to discover that the authority of the Governor of the Sea had shifted again. He stared at Lato Guiaro in confusion and horror, as if looking at a true devil.
Why? Why does the sea favor him more?
Why does the sea favor this traitor more?
At that moment, Mad Lady, on the other side of the bow, completed reciting the incoherent order.
The silver-gray behemoth at the bottom of the sea trembled slightly, increasing in magnitude, causing the entire seabed and all the seawater to quake.
Inside, beams of pure light converged and shot out from the open entrance, landing at the edge of the betrothal ship, forming a transparent tunnel-like energy passageway.
Mad Lady didn't immediately leap into the pure light.
She understood that as the spaceship opened and activated further, the power accumulated in the depths of the seal would erupt. Everyone present, except the Governor of the Sea, would be torn apart.
But it didn't matter. She had a solution. The plain silver ring on her right hand, a gift from Bard, held the boon from honoring the ancestors. It could steal that power and distribute it, sharing the burden with all the Children of the Sea in Port Santa.
Of course, those present would receive more. Whether they could endure it or not depended on fate.
When the moment arrived, the Fisheries Guild members would believe the sea prayer ritual had succeeded, celebrating with joy. Little did they know that their "sea" had been stolen. The irony delighted Mad Lady.
Just as she was about to use the ring, a strong sense of Danger Premonition hit her.
In a flash, her figure vanished, reappearing a few steps away.
A shadow rose from the deck where she had stood, but it failed to envelop her.
Mad Lady then spotted Mr. K, draped in a blood-colored cloak and hood, and Lumian Lee, wearing the Lie earring but yet to revert to his original appearance.
...
Port Santa, Governor of the Sea's residence.

Bard stood by the window, gazing at the weeds outside. Silently calculating the time, he waited for the sea prayer ritual to progress.

If the sea's boon arrived with a delay and cheers erupted from Milo Village, he would openly leave this place, abandoning those who had been deceived.

When the moment arrived, anyone attempting to stop him would be torn apart by the power of the sea.

In the absence of a delayed collective boon, but with the sky and sea undergoing ominous changes, as if a catastrophe had struck, Bard could wait for the spaceship or Mad Lady to pick him up.

Of course, he wouldn't wait indefinitely. If there were no further developments from the sea prayer ritual within ten minutes, he would use his abilities to forcefully exit, shift positions, and conceal himself.

The early-stage abilities of the Marauder pathway weren't formidable. Bard had developed the habit of remaining vigilant as he advanced step by step.

As the weeds swayed in the bright sunlight and mild wind, Bard suddenly heard faint footsteps.

The sound emanated from the corridor outside, so subtle that it seemed almost like an illusion.

Chapter 580: Theft

Bard pivoted on his heels, fixing his eyes on the door.

A moment lingered in silence, but no one rapped against the wooden barrier. The once-present soft footsteps in the corridor had now faded into nothingness.

As a seasoned Beyonder, Bard dismissed the notion of hallucination. Returning to the servant's bed, he grabbed the backpack containing the spoils of the year, feigning an escape from the Governor of the Sea's residence before confirming the outcome of the sea prayer ritual.

Such precautions were only sensible. Not everyone placed full trust in Juan Oro's promises.

Bard slung the backpack over his shoulder and slyly opened the window, aiming to slip into the weeds below.

Suddenly, a figure, standing over a meter tall, emerged from the shadows in the corner. Its disproportionately large head and wrinkled face identified it as one of the Little Devils from the sea spawn.

The Little Devil gestured for Bard to close the glass window.

Just a bunch of creatures with low IQs, Bard thought, mocking them inwardly. Despite generations, they have yet to master Highlander and can only barely communicate like dogs...

Maintaining a timid expression, Bard closed the window.

Having tested the waters, he had a rough idea of where the sea spawn responsible for monitoring him were hiding.

None of them appeared to have any connection to the soft footsteps echoing in the corridor, nor did they seem aware of them.

...

On the betrothal boat, Mad Lady, draped in a blood-colored dress with a portion of her face showing pure flesh and blood, instantly vanished upon spotting Mr. K and Lumian. She swiftly changed her position.

Simultaneously, a figure materialized behind and to her side—Lumian and Mr. K.

Employing their teleportation abilities, they blocked Mad Lady.

After Mad Lady shifted to the opposite side of the deck, the corners of her mouth, made of pure flesh and blood, curled up. Her grayish-green eyes gleamed with anticipation and excitement.

Come and attack me. Chase me. This way, no one will use the item that honored the ancestors to steal the deep power about to erupt. Let's see who reacts the fastest and 'teleports' out of these waters when the time comes!

For those unable to escape in time, they would undoubtedly be torn to pieces by the violent power, much like the fate that befell others on the ship!
As these thoughts raced through her mind, Mad Lady swiftly turned transparent, evading Lumian's crimson near-white fireballs and Mr. K's light-green wind blades.
Amidst the rumbling explosion, Ultraman Lato Guiaro was equally infuriated by Mad Lady's actions. If he were still the temporary and complete Governor of the Sea, he wouldn't fear the impact of the potent power in the spaceship. He hadn't intended to release Mad Lady and use Bard's silver ring.
However, the situation had changed. Juan Oro, burning his life and sacrificing flesh and blood, had contested him for the authority of the Governor of the Sea.
In this state, Ultraman couldn't be certain if he was fully protected or if he would suffer some level of damage. Furthermore, not being a true demigod, he wasn't sure if he could withstand such a blow, one that left him only injured.
He couldn't help but urge Mad Lady with his eyes, but his companion was 'teleporting' and didn't have time to meet his gaze.
The humanoid Sealed Artifact remained immersed in distant chanting in the darkness, oblivious to the impending sea's fury.
In the blink of an eye, corporeal starlight surged from the silver-gray behemoth at the bottom of the sea. It followed the condensed energy passageway and struck the betrothal ship with a tsunami-like sound, aiming to devour everything around it.
"Here it comes!" Mad Lady eagerly prepared for her extreme escape.
Confronted with the immense wave of starlight, Lumian's initial reaction was, *Why is there another sea's fury?*
Relying on his combat instincts, he immediately extended his spirituality to the Lie earring on his left ear, activating the high-level stealing power attached to the mystical item.
The starlight in his eyes took on a more tangible form, as if it had materialized.
Lumian's raised left hand subtly twisted his wrist.
The starlight surging from the silver-gray behemoth changed its course, rushing towards Lumian in waves, engulfing the sky and the sea.
This was even more terrifying than the previous sea's rage. At that moment, Lumian felt as if an apocalypse had descended.
He knew very well that he couldn't absorb all the stolen power himself. Doing so would render him unable to endure, crushed into rotten meat on the spot, indirectly aiding Termiboros in escaping His predicament. Fortunately, the stolen power linked to

"honoring the ancestors" had the ability to disperse the boon obtained and share it with everyone present and all those with the sea bloodlines in Port Santa, similar to every successful sea prayer ritual.
Though a bit greedy and reluctant, Lumian restrained himself. Without hesitation, he opened his left hand, seemingly grasping something, and twisted his wrist in the opposite direction.
Suddenly, the starlight that had darkened the sky and sea seemed to explode from within, scattering radiant starlight in every direction.
"The stars are raining..." Franca, concealed in the cabin on the sailboat, lamented.
She tightly clutched the Major Arcana card belonging to Judgment in her hand.
This wasn't a plea for Madam Judgment to descend directly. After all, this wasn't within her jurisdiction. It was to signal the location for the Major Arcana card holders who had already gathered nearby.
The beams of starlight left dazzling trails as they penetrated the bodies of those nearby and soared towards the bloodline connections farther away.
Lumian couldn't control this process, so he could only sense a portion of the starlight landing on him, causing his left chest to burn and corrode his flesh. Simultaneously, he witnessed a significant amount of starlight being drawn towards the potent sea bloodline and the authority of the Governor of the Sea, surging towards Ultraman and Juan Oro.
Undoubtedly, the humanoid Sealed Artifact received the most boons.
Like the eye of a vortex, she incessantly absorbed the surrounding starlight. Even the starlight heading towards Hela's sailboat diminished noticeably.
Ultraman experienced a replenishment, breaking free from his weakened state after Juan Oro's two beams, swiftly reclaiming the authority of the Governor of the Sea.
In his moment of elation, Ultraman Lato Guiaro felt intense surprise and confusion.
Why can Lumian Lee also steal the spacecraft's power?
That requires a high-level stealing ability...
Hasn't Bard's ring already been placed on the altar to honor the ancestors? And we've confirmed its corresponding effects.
Isn't the enchantment only possible once a year?
Amidst the echoing shock, Lato Guiaro couldn't be bothered to ponder the answer. His instinctive reaction was to swiftly crush

Juan Oro. Otherwise, who knew what he, now strengthened, would do!
At that moment, Juan Oro felt a surge of regained strength. He observed his cracked chest and hazy flesh, now covered in starlight scales, with blood flowing out dyed in a resplendent "color."
Gazing at Lato Guiaro, he suddenly smiled—a smile of relief, yearning, and evident anger.
His body underwent a rapid transformation, eyes turning vertical, scales growing, and limbs thickening. In the span of a breath, he morphed into a humanoid lizard.
During this process, Lato Guiaro condensed a dark-green light that descended on Juan Oro in a series of rays.
Juan Oro made no attempt to dodge; he endured it.
His aura rapidly weakened, precisely as he desired.
His lizard-like form faded, growing increasingly translucent, as if condensed from starlight.
Then, Juan Oro merged into the void representing the sea and spoke to Lato Guiaro with a complex expression, "I've returned to the sea. Come quickly too..."
At the last few words, Juan Oro gnashed his teeth, not concealing his deep-
seated hatred.
Every Child of the Sea was prepared to return to the sea, and Juan Oro was no exception. However, he hadn't anticipated doing so in this manner.
His sole desire now was for Lato Guiaro to join him!
Juan Oro's figure dissipated, becoming entirely a part of the "sea."
Ultraman Lato Guiaro immediately sensed a growing animosity between his title as Governor of the Sea and the waters. The harmony that once existed had given way to a resistance emanating from the Power of the Sea.
This indicated that the Governor of the Sea authority he had acquired wouldn't be complete for some time.
Damned old fellow! Lato Guiaro cursed inwardly, but he remained composed.
He had realized that Hela was the sole demigod on the sailboat. The humanoid Sealed Artifact, having received a boon from the sea and escaped the influence of the chanting, was sufficient to hold off the opposition for a while.
Though uncertain why Gandalf and the others hadn't arrived, Ultraman Lato Guiaro welcomed this turn of events.
It allowed him to focus on dealing with Lumian Lee and his ally!
Despite being an incomplete Governor of the Sea, he possessed

enough strength to control adversaries below the demigod level briefly and gain entry to the spaceship first. Moreover, Mad Lady's assistance added to his advantage.

Having received the sea's boon, Lumian contemplated his newfound capabilities.

Now, I seem qualified to contend for the authority of the Governor of the Sea...

Although I can't be considered to possess the sea bloodline and only wield some power of the sea lasting a week, far inferior to Ultraman, my fake level is high enough. I'm at the Angel level!

Just as Ultraman Lato Guiaro and Lumian responded swiftly, the gray sky suddenly brightened.

Thick bluish-green vines descended, shrouding the two ships and the surrounding area in torrential rain. Soon, they intertwined into a giant-like forest growing above the sea.

Chapter 581: Gap

Upon witnessing the descent of the thick bluish-green vines, Lumian marveled as if a real carriage could traverse their expanse. It felt like a journey back to a scene from a few years ago when he would listen to his sister's nighttime fairy tales.

The dazzling, dreamlike scene and boundless imagination seemed to materialize in reality at that very moment.

Ultraman Lato Guiaro sensed imminent danger.

The individual capable of such an effect couldn't be a Low- or Mid-Sequence Beyonder; they had to be a Saint who had unlocked the door to godhood. Perhaps even beyond Sequence 4!

Another formidable demigod had entered the scene!

Who could it be? *Where had they emerged from?*

This certainly wasn't Gandalf. While others might be unaware, Loki had thoroughly investigated the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, discovering he was a Beyonder of the Warrior pathway—a Warrior who had a penchant for research and mysticism.

In the blink of an eye, Lato Guiaro spotted a black shadow racing down the thick green vines. It was an enormous pumpkin drawn by numerous gray mice.

A hole atop the orange pumpkin resembled a coach. Within, a vaguely discernible woman sat, adorned in a purple robe, with crystalline heels adorning her feet.

A pumpkin coach, mice-drawn carriage, crystal heels—WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT!? Who could it be? Lato Guiaro's pupils dilated, and he couldn't help but inwardly curse with the same words he used most frequently before transmigration.

Isn't that Cinderella?

Did Roselle actually pen this fairy tale? Why hadn't it gained traction, remaining unknown to most?

For a fleeting moment, Lato Guiaro grappled with uncertainty, unable to discern whether the newcomer was a demigod aligned with another faction or a concealed powerhouse within the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Regaining his composure, he cursed his ill fortune and prepared himself for a confrontation with the enigmatic demigod.

Luckily, being the Governor of the Sea, he could at least temporarily impede the other party in these aquatic surroundings.

Prior to the impending clash, Ultraman Lato Guiaro turned his gaze towards Mad Lady.

He didn't have time to speak, but his eyes expressed the unspoken message: "Hurry up! No time for games!"

Mad Lady swiftly grasped Ultraman's urgency and, with a blink, positioned herself at the entrance of the energy passageway. However, instead of materializing precisely there, she outlined her presence.

This decision was prompted by the sudden appearance of Mr. K and Lumian, seemingly having "teleported" nearby, with their sights set on the energy passageway's entrance.

Splash!

Whether from the imposing weight of the humanoid Sealed Artifact or Lato Guiaro raising his right arm, conjuring a mountainous azure wave, the water around the cave visibly swayed, teetering on the brink of collapse.

In that critical moment, "Cinderella," seated in the pumpkin carriage, pushed open the door and rose to her feet.

She extended her arms, and a massive iron-black cross materialized behind her.

The weight of the cross proved challenging for "Cinderella" to bear, as though it carried the concentrated sins of the entire world.

A cross? Ultraman Lato Guiaro was caught off guard as an empty room materialized before him.

Within the room, candlelight flickered, revealing a long table adorned with flesh and blood.

On either side of the table, three obscure figures hunched over, gnawing and feasting on a gruesome banquet.

Abruptly, the three figures turned their heads, fixing their gaze upon Lato Guiaro.

He stood frozen, as if their gazes had penetrated his deepest secrets, dismantling them into the essential components of spirit and flesh.

A chilling sensation surged from the depths of Lato Guiaro's heart, immediately alerting him to an intense and terrifying malice.

However, the source of this malevolence wasn't the newly arrived demigod but the silver-gray behemoth trapped at the sea's bottom —the very spaceship Lato Guiaro sought to obtain harbored ill intentions towards him!

In the blink of an eye, the silver-gray behemoth retracted its authority.

Lato Guiaro's status as the Governor of the Sea plummeted. Despite gaining a new boon, he couldn't ascend to the demigod level.

The spaceship had betrayed him.

This treachery was a result of the spell Cinderella had just unleashed—the Feast of Betrayal. Its purpose was to temporarily awaken or bestow intelligence on a target item, compelling it to commit an act of "betrayal."

Lato Guiaro had seamlessly melded with the surrounding waters, harnessing the authority of the Governor of the Sea on a temporary basis. The spaceship now stood as an entity he had yet to fully master.
Objects beyond his full control were prime candidates for betrayal!
"Cinderella" astutely sensed this vulnerability, initiating the Feast of Betrayal from the outset.
Simultaneously, the sealed environment provided the perfect conditions for her to unleash this magic—an act she might not dare attempt elsewhere.
In that moment, surprise and fear flooded Lato Guiaro. It felt as though a frigid cascade had drenched him, sending shivers through his entire being.
Since merging with the sea and gaining the Governor of the Sea's authority, Lato Guiaro had believed that ordinary Sequence 4 or even Sequence 3 demigods—commonly referred to as Saints—couldn't swiftly overpower him in this realm.
This belief created a sense of parity, but it hinged on him remaining within the waters to fully unleash his strength.
Yet, "Cinderella's" mere magic stripped him of the Governor of the Sea's authority, relegating him to Sequence 5. Without godhood, mastery over the sea slipped from his grasp.
Despite being a dual Sequence 5 of a potion and boon system with numerous unique abilities, Lato Guiaro harbored doubts about facing a genuine demigod.
A demigod temporarily shaped from an item proves fragile in the face of a true demigod. So brittle that, once targeted, they wouldn't endure even a breath... Lato Guiaro grappled with the stark realization of the fragility of a true demigod and sank into deep regret and despair.
At that moment, the silver-gray behemoth trembled violently, causing the energy passageway at the entrance to flicker and cast its luminance upon Lato Guiaro.
With a whoosh, Lato Guiaro found himself hurtling uncontrollably into the spaceship through the pure energy conduit.
This was a facet of the spaceship's calculated "betrayal," aiming to turn the recent "authority holder" into a mere nutritive substrate within a petri dish!
Lato Guiaro was initially startled, but soon a wave of joy washed over him.
An opportunity had presented itself!
It allowed him to infiltrate the spaceship, wrest control, and set it in motion
—a chance to escape!

His misfortune and despair had suddenly transformed into this golden opportunity!
Observing the unfolding scene, Lumian wasted no time. He employed Spirit World Traversal once more, reaching the entrance of the energy passageway. Stepping in, he soared into the silver-gray behemoth.
Mad Lady trailed closely behind, and Mr. K didn't intervene; instead, he followed suit.
...
Milo Village, Governor of the Sea's residence.
Bard, strategizing an escape plan, was abruptly interrupted by cheers.
Cheers... Bard's heart stirred, prompting him to dash out of the servant's room towards the nearest glass window overlooking the dock. There, he observed the gathered villagers.
Not a single sea spawn hindered the former Governor of the Sea during this process.
Many villagers raised their hands, seemingly welcoming the waves. As they praised the sea, an almost invisible glow descended, dispersing like water to different individuals.
The nearby children joyfully shouted, "The sea prayer ritual has succeeded! The sea prayer ritual has succeeded!"
That's right, it has "succeeded"... Bard smiled.
From the looks of it, Ultraman and Mad Lady have succeeded.
The April Fool's key member adjusted the collar of his crisp white shirt and hoisted a brown backpack onto his shoulders. With an unabashed smile, he strolled into the grand hall of the Governor of the Sea's residence, smoothly making his way out.
This time, he encountered no resistance. The guards stationed at the entrance knelt on the ground, expressing gratitude to the sea for its boon.
Bard took a detour to the docks, reveling in the genuine joy and praise for the sea. Every time he heard the townsfolk praising the sea and witnessed genuine smiles, his spirits lifted.
These fools!
They are treating a catastrophe as a cause for celebration!
This is a prank, a prank on everyone in Port Santa... Bard closed his eyes in satisfaction and weaved through the crowd, heading deeper into Milo Village. His ultimate destination: the peaks of the Pyraez mountain range.
As a former Swindler, Bard orchestrated the sea prayer ritual operation, serving as its main planner. The plan's success naturally brought him satisfaction.
Crucially, despite taking the most pivotal step in the entire

operation, he assumed the least risk and exposure, avoiding direct confrontations.

Navigating through the mix of ancient and modern structures in Milo Village, Bard's brow furrowed slightly.

A sense of unease settled upon him.

Per the initial plan, Ultraman—unhindered by strong opposition—was supposed to use the second command to open the energy passageway. Relying on his temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea, he aimed to secure safety for himself and Mad Lady within him. Seizing the opportunity, he planned to eliminate all present and inflict severe injuries on potential demigod adversaries.

If powerhouses like Hela emerged and proved resistant to the humanoid Sealed Artifact, Ultraman—the interim Governor of the Sea—would leap into action, confronting the formidable foes head-on. Mad Lady, wielding her enchanted ring, would harness the potent energy emanating from the spaceship, transforming it into a boon for everyone present, extending its reach to all the Children of the Sea in Port Santa's vicinity. This strategic move not only allowed them to sidestep danger but also granted them access to the spaceship, enabling them to activate it.

Despite the fact that the people had already received the sea's boon and a few minutes had elapsed, the spaceship remained dormant, and the sky showed no signs of change.

What had transpired during this interval?

With this lingering question, Bard hastened his steps.

Tap, tap, tap.

Behind him, the faint sound of light footsteps echoed once again.

Chapter 582: Efficient Person-Locator

Port Santa, in the city.

Loki and the unconscious Ludwig had already sought refuge in an apartment that Loki had rented many days earlier. He began manipulating the sealed demigod's Spirit Body Threads.

As for his two marionettes, they lurked within a radius of 100 to 200 meters, with Loki as the center, blending in with the various celebrating and passing crowds. They waited to be discovered by Lumian Lee's teammates and the clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother.

This was unavoidable. A Marionettist couldn't allow a marionette to wield their Faceless powers. As for the mystical item of the Seer pathway, it was in the possession of either Bard or Mad Lady.

In the partially destroyed suite of Solow Motel, Jenna and Anthony encountered Noelia, the combat nun, and her teammates, who had hurried over.

Before this, Lumian had covertly introduced the disguised Jenna and Anthony to Noelia. Hence, the nuns didn't unnecessarily question or apprehend them; they only carefully confirmed each other's identities.

"Rubió Paco is a fake. He's disguised by a Marionettist. He has captured Louis Berry's godson. He possesses two marionettes. One is Madame Martha, the Paco family's matriarch. The other's identity and abilities are unknown," Jenna recounted the recent events.

She assumed that the Fertility Order was familiar with the term Marionettist and didn't delve into unnecessary explanations. Their primary duty was to guard against the Intis Republic to the north, and many official Beyonders of Bureau 8 in the Intis Republic belonged to the Seer pathway. The two sides must have had considerable interactions.

Marionettist... Indeed, upon hearing the Sequence name, Noelia frowned slightly. Is Intis sending spies to disrupt the sea prayer ritual?

"That's a traitor from Intis's Bureau 8," Jenna explained, her allegiance to Intis stronger than Lumian's.

Noelia understood that time was of the essence and she couldn't discuss unrelated matters. She asked the key question, "Why seize Louis Berry's godson? Is he held as a hostage, or does he possess some extraordinary significance?"

Jenna thought for a moment and revealed the limited information she had just learned.

"It's a sealed demigod, a creature.

"Loki will need substantial time to transform him into a marionette, not just a matter of minutes."
A demigod? A sealed demigod? That child with the insatiable appetite is a sealed demigod? Noelia's mouth hung open in surprise and astonishment. She almost questioned the reliability of her own ears.
The supposed godson of the adventurer Louis Berry is, in fact, a sealed demigod creature?
What's his backstory? Why is he wandering around with a sealed demigod creature?
Moreover, there's talk of a humanoid Sealed Artifact, rumored to be at Grade 1, that recently surfaced in Port Santa. It's on par with a sealed demigod creature. Despite extensive searching, no one has been able to locate it.
If not for the disparities in appearance, gender, and age, Noelia might have suspected Ludwig to be the humanoid Sealed Artifact that the Eternal Blazing Sun Church had "misplaced."
Now, an absurd idea echoed in her mind.
Is it the current trend to stroll around with sealed demigod creatures?
Regaining her composure, Noelia promptly addressed her team members, "Cemilie, quickly return to the Order and inform the dean. Ask her to deploy all available personnel to the city. Locate them as soon as possible. Yes, Madam Martha or Louis Berry's godson, Ludwig.
"After finding them, unless the situation is exceptionally urgent, refrain from acting recklessly. Report first and await assistance."
Considering that the Marionettist had likely altered his appearance and height, and the identity and appearance of his other marionette were unknown, Noelia concentrated her search on Madam Martha, who had become a marionette, and Ludwig, who had been abducted.
"Yes, Captain!" In a bid to save time, the brown-haired Cemilie darted through the shattered glass window. Utilizing the stone bricks and wood protruding from the outer wall, she leaped from the fifth floor to the street.
The dean Noelia referred to was the head of the local cloister, the clergyman overseeing the Fertility Order in Port Santa—the Fertility Order's headquarters in Torres, the capital of Gaia Province.
Just as Cemilie took a few steps and was about to explore the nearby streets, Jenna, Anthony, Noelia, and the others witnessed a massive bird soaring through the air.
The bird's body was grayish-black, its feathers were tough and

lacked softness. Its eyes appeared to be adorned with two rubies.
The grayish-black bird flapped its wings and glided to the collapsed fifth-
floor outer wall of Solow Motel.
Only then did Jenna and Anthony realize that the grayish-black bird was sculpted from stone. It was weighty, substantial, and unyielding, yet it emanated a vibrant vitality.
Perched on the back of the lifelike grayish-black bird was a woman in a brown clergyman's robe. She wore a nun's wimple with wheat patterns and seemed to be in her thirties, but she exuded a maternal aura, as if she had nurtured many children.
The brown-haired, brown-eyed, mature, and stunning clergyman turned her gaze to Noelia and succinctly stated, "Details."
Noelia swiftly echoed Jenna's words. She positioned herself with a slight spread of her legs and raised her hands.
"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"
The clergyman was none other than the archbishop of the Church of Earth Mother's Gaia diocese, Agrippina.
Agrippina nodded gently and uttered, "I know Martha from the Paco family. I didn't expect her to meet such a fate. Sigh, may the Earth Mother embrace her soul, and may the flower symbolizing her bloom again next spring."
The archbishop delicately shifted her right foot, conveying a signal to the massive bird sculpted from grayish-black stone.
The stone bird, pulsating with vitality, flapped its wings and ascended dozens of meters into the air.
Agrippina extended her right hand and scattered a handful of dark-black seeds the size of rice grains.
With a flutter, the port's white-headed seabirds flocked in, covering the sky. Each one gripped a seed in its beak and circled around.
They formed a circle within a 300-meter radius.
Observing this spectacle, the jubilant citizens of Port Santa, assuming that the seabirds had joined in the celebration of the successful sea prayer ritual, erupted in cheers of delight.
After two to three minutes, a solitary combat nun spotted Madam Martha. The marionette was concealed on the other side of Aquina Street.
Upon receiving the information, Agrippina turned her head and fixed her gaze into the air.
Soon, the white-headed seabirds released the rice-sized seeds from their beaks.
Agrippina withdrew her gaze and folded her arms across her chest.
Each seed that touched the ground instantly sprouted and grew

rapidly, morphing into thick dark-green vines.
Simultaneously, Jenna, Anthony, Noelia, and the others, who were scouring the street for Ludwig and Loki, witnessed the sky darken, as if night had prematurely descended or a colossal creature had eclipsed the sunlight.
Vaguely, they sensed the presence of a massive pitch-black wing covered in a membrane, casting an illusory aura.
In the next moment, a crimson full moon ascended from the night, hanging high in the sky. It seemed as though a tall, slender figure was slowly advancing.
Crimson moonlight bathed the area surrounded by the dark-green vines, captivating all the citizens like statues.
Nourished by the moonlight, the dark-green vines swiftly expanded, swiftly encasing the streets around Aquina Street in a "forest."
Dark-red flowers blossomed in the "forest," densely clustered and ubiquitous.
The flowers emitted a faint, sweet fragrance that intermingled, gradually intensifying the scent.
Upon inhaling this fragrance, the residents of Port Santa, as well as the rats and bedbugs in the corresponding area, entered a stupor, swaying and collapsing to the ground.
Dammit! Jenna understood that Archbishop Agrippina of the Church of Earth Mother was employing indiscriminate tactics to influence the area, aiming to locate and control Loki, but she still cursed internally.
This gaseous anesthetic jogged unpleasant memories.
In the past, she had nearly fallen victim to a similar gas used by that Bliss Society pervert.
Yet now, in the diffusing gas with a noticeable difference in smell but a similar effect, her head started to spin, and her body felt uneasy.
The same was true for Anthony and Noelia. One bore dragon-like scales on his skin, while the other held her breath.
At that moment, three white-headed seabirds descended from the sky, each clutching a metallic bottle, circling Jenna and the others.
Noelia glanced at Archbishop Agrippina, who was hovering in midair, and received a nod. Without hesitation, she took the bottle from a white-headed seabird's claw and gulped it down.
She swiftly regained consciousness, no longer affected by the gaseous anesthetic.
Observing this, Jenna and Anthony accepted the metal bottles and consumed the sour agent.
They no longer felt dizzy and weak.

The three white-headed seabirds weakly ascended again, landing by the roadside one after another, and dozed off.
In the area surrounded by the dark-green vine "forest," only a marionette remained standing at that moment, impervious to the gaseous anesthetic. Its presence was immediately exposed.
In the apartment he had pre-rented, Loki was taken aback to discover that controlling the sealed demigod's Spirit Body Threads was much more challenging than he had anticipated.
This wasn't a problem that could be resolved in ten minutes. According to his initial estimate, it would take at least an hour!
Given the time, the Church of Earth Mother could turn these streets upside down!
As the gaseous anesthetic created by the dark-green vines and dark-red flowers permeated the room, Loki's initial impulse was to craft an air straw nearly 30 meters long and extend it high into the air to breathe fresh air. However, he quickly dismissed the idea.
Perhaps the demigod of the Church of Earth Mother was waiting to detect similar traces to pinpoint his location!
Moreover, Loki had realized that there was more than one demigod in the sky!
If there was only one, he could rely on Sealed Artifacts, bestowments, and other means to concentrate. He could conceal himself in the shadows and contend with them to see if he could endure until the marionette-making process was completed. However, there were at least two demigods observing.
More importantly, he could endure for about ten minutes, but an hour was out of the question!
After weighing the pros and cons, Loki abandoned his original plan to conduct the ritual today and advance to Sequence 4 Bizarro Sorcerer.
In any case, as long as he could restrain the sealed demigod, he could find another opportunity in the future. There was no need for him to perform today!
Why would it take an hour or more? Is this a demigod's Spirit Body Threads? Amidst Loki's confusion, he didn't intend to recall the two marionettes. He planned on using the mystical item to "teleport" away.
From his pocket, he retrieved a bracelet made of different-colored gems.
Just as Loki was about to activate a diamond, he heard the sound of swallowing.
Loki instinctively lowered his head and looked into his arms, realizing that Ludwig had awakened at some point.
With a sincere expression, the boy spoke with a hint of eagerness,

"I'm hungry..."

Chapter 583: Celestial Worthy's Revelation

Around the betrothal ship and sailboat, thick turquoise vines cascaded from the sky. They entwined, creating a "road" leading to various destinations.

"Cinderella" returned to the orange-yellow pumpkin coach, pulled by gray mice swiftly descending through the vines. They approached the energy passageway formed by pure light, as if about to enter the silver-gray behemoth embedded in the seabed.

Abruptly, the mischief of gray mice came to a halt. "Cinderella," adorned in a purple robe, wore a solemn expression, purple spots dancing in her pupils.

"Cinderella" sensed an unusually perilous presence deep within the silver-
gray behemoth. It remained motionless, as if in a deep slumber or long dead. However, in either case, her intuition warned her not to approach, lest she suffer severe corruption or similar effects.

Staring at the energy passageway where Lumian and company had vanished, she deliberated for a few seconds before shifting her focus to the sailboat.

With Mr. Fool's seal on the Seven of Wands and the sealed evil god's angel, he didn't have to worry about the problem that even she had to be wary of—as long as he didn't directly see those things, hear its voice, or enter the core area.

As for the other one, he seemed to be a Shepherd, so he didn't mind being even crazier.

"Cinderella" observed the mast and shipboard of the sailboat cracking under the terrifying suction of the humanoid Sealed Artifact's "heaviness" characteristic. She was ready to make her move when she retrieved a Roselle chess piece from her dark-purple coin bag and hurled it at the target in the black nun's attire.

Amidst the howling wind, the Queen chess piece soared towards the humanoid Sealed Artifact, accompanied by various miscellaneous items.

As it descended, the humanoid Sealed Artifact's steps towards the sailboat slowed, as if time itself was warping around her.

This was one of the spells of "Cinderella"—the Chessboard of Ages.

It had the power to decelerate the target as if they had entered an area where time moved at a different speed.

Seizing the opportunity presented by the sluggish movement, "Cinderella" closed her eyes and transformed into a humanoid phantom, collapsing into the invisible coffin.

The eyelids of the humanoid Sealed Artifact drooped, as if she might succumb to sleep at any moment.

Sleeping Beauty magic!
Witnessing this, Hela, aboard the sailboat, once again activated the Evernight pathway's ability to forcibly drag people into a dream.
Although the notarization wouldn't immediately expire with Ultraman Lato Guiaro's loss of the Governor of the Sea authority, it would still last until the end. However, the ability to be invalidated by notarization wasn't entirely ineffective. It would only be weakened, and its effects would be significantly reduced. Now, the humanoid Sealed Artifact was already fatigued, swaying and on the verge of falling asleep.
In this state, entering a dream was undoubtedly much easier.
The humanoid Sealed Artifact, donned in a black nun's attire, finally closed her eyes and plunged into a deep slumber. She entered a somewhat sorrowful dream, causing her face to contort slightly as she frowned.
On the sailboat, a dense darkness surged once more, enveloping the humanoid Sealed Artifact, resonating with a distant voice that brought peace and tranquility.
It was akin to a mother reciting a poem to lull her child to sleep, fostering a serene slumber.
The humanoid Sealed Artifact, still in her black nun's attire, hovered in midair with her eyes tightly shut. She descended slowly, landing gracefully on the deck of the sailboat.
Her brows gradually relaxed, her face softened, and crystalline water droplets formed at the corners of her eyes.
The Maidens of the Sea, deputy hosts, and sailors, blessed by the sea and adorned with starlight scales, swiftly settled in the darkness, succumbing to sleep amidst the enchanting chanting.
Franca, within the sail cabin, was taken aback by the unfolding battle.
I-isn't that Cinderella?
I-isn't that Jack and the Beanstalk?
What manner of magic is this?
I-isn't that Sleeping Beauty?
Who is this? Have I arrived in a fairyland?
I have to admit, it's truly dreamlike...
Two demigods working together are undoubtedly formidable. They swiftly subdued the humanoid Sealed Artifact...
I also wish to become a demigod!
A Demoness demigod would do too...
Regaining her senses, Franca concealed herself and sprinted out of the sailboat. Utilizing her run-up and an Assassin's Feather Fall, she elegantly leaped onto the betrothal ship, intending to approach the energy passageway at the bow.

...
Within the silver-gray behemoth.
After Lumian traversed the energy passageway, he found himself not in the metal beehive he had seen before.
Walking on the silvery-white metal floor, he noticed a hall dozens of meters long and 20 to 30 meters wide ahead.
In the middle of the hall, Ultraman Lato Guiaro stood, donning Simon Guiaro's face, and shouted in delight, "*(...¥#)"
This represented the first half of the command to activate the spaceship by entering the password and gaining access.
However, there was no response from the spaceship.
Crap... It still holds ill intentions towards me and isn't willing to grant access... This malice stems from that demigod's ability. It shouldn't last long. As long as I can stall for time, I should be able to regain control... Can the humanoid Sealed Artifact hold back two demigods? Or can I rely on the spaceship's internal layout to play "hide and seek?" A series of thoughts raced through Ultraman's anxious mind.
At that moment, through the translucent metal wall to the side of the hall, he saw "Cinderella" in the pumpkin coach come to a halt near the energy passageway, seemingly apprehensive about something.
As expected!
She doesn't dare to enter!
Exhilaration surged from Ultraman Lato Guiaro's heart.
Before the mission kicked off, Loki had set up an altar and sought guidance from Celestial Worthy through divination. The response he got was: Contains a high risk from high-ranking individuals. Avoidable by entering the spaceship.
Loki decoded this as a warning about Hela and Gandalf from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, as well as the Saint from the Church of Earth Mother overlooking Port Santa. These high-ranking figures were the primary threats. However, if he could take the reins of the mystical sci-fi spaceship first, he believed he could outmaneuver these formidable opponents.
Now, Lato Guiaro noticed that even without absolute control of the spaceship, the new demigod hesitated, as if haunted by an unseen fear.
Facing something capable of unsettling a demigod left Lato Guiaro uneasy. However, armed with the spaceship's command and password, he could soon turn potential threats to his advantage. There was no need for fear.
As Lumian was on the brink of "teleporting" behind Ultraman Lato Guiaro, they both heard a metallic clang.

A silver metal door descended, sealing off the hall's entrance and exit completely.
The walls, ceiling, and floor transformed as metal surfaces shifted and revealed dark pipe openings.
Out gushed cerulean-blue gas.
Poison gas! Lato Guiaro's heart raced as he grasped the situation.
The spaceship, still imbued with malice, not only resisted control but also emanated lethal intent, seeking to eliminate him before its animosity subsided.
The magic of the demigod outside is malicious indeed!
Lumian perceived this as an instinctive strike from the silver-gray behemoth against intruders. Swiftly, he tapped into the power of the sea, aiming to invoke the temporary authority of the Governor of the Sea to counter the threat.
He could sense that Ultraman had lost the Governor of the Sea's position after the attack from the "Cinderella" demigod, with no immediate prospect of reclaiming it. With no contenders for the authority, Lumian anticipated an easy acquisition.
Yet, the "waters" resisted, refusing Lumian the temporary position of Governor of the Sea.
Its malice seemed directed at anyone attempting control!
Undeterred, Lumian shifted his focus back to Ultraman Lato Guiaro, a crucial member of April Fool's.
Lato Guiaro's heart stirred as he shouted, "Do you want to fight here? If we don't break out and waste no time, we'll all die!"
In this dire moment, a plan to escape the hall and relocate became paramount. The malice wouldn't linger for long.
Seek vengeance in a safe space. If we perish here, who will assist in eliminating the others?
Lumian nonchalantly flexed his wrists, donning the Flog boxing gloves, and grinned, stating,
"I don't care about my own death. All that matters now is one thing: Ending you!"
As the words left his lips, crimson flames, bordering on white, erupted from his entire being, as if he were cloaked in a fiery shroud.
...
Not far from Lumian and Lato Guiaro, Mad Lady and Mr. K found themselves in the beehive-like metal room, unable to enter the hall ahead.
Surveying the surroundings, Mr. K's gaze swept across the incubating Batings Black Insect, Little Devils, and other creatures. He nodded in satisfaction.
"It's indeed the power of an evil god, spawn of an evil god. Well

done, Lumian! Well done! This is all part of God's arrangement!"
Amidst the hoarse voice, the Aurora Order Oracle turned his gaze back to Mad Lady.
Mad Lady wasn't intimidated. Instead, she applauded in agreement with Mr. K.
She spoke as if they were on different frequencies.
"That's right, it's cool, right? This is a spaceship!"
In the next moment, Mad Lady and Mr. K vanished simultaneously and reappeared behind where the other party had been standing, as if they had negotiated a position switch beforehand.

Chapter 584: "Helper"

Inside the underwater spaceship, in the silvery hall.

Lumian, enveloped by crimson, nearly white flames, transformed into a fireball and hurtled towards Ultraman Lato Guiaro.

The key April Fool's member remained composed. Holding his breath, he thrust forward with his left palm.

Lumian instantly sensed an invisible force resisting him, causing the blazing crimson fireball to decelerate abruptly, akin to a trapped insect in transparent amber.

Seizing the moment, Lato Guiaro raised his right hand, clenching it into a fist.

A ball of blazing white pure sunlight condensed and compressed, swiftly morphing into a thick, formidable laser aimed at Lumian, fused with the crimson near-white fireball.

This ability resulted from merging the Sun pathway and the Sea boon, utilizing the power of the Sun pathway to propel the Sea boon's Weakening Ray. Though it no longer altered the target's body gradually, causing various negative symptoms, its penetration and melting effects were significantly enhanced, capable of directly injuring or even killing the target.

In the enclosed, poisonous gas-filled environment with the constant threat of malice, Lato Guiaro sought to conclude the battle swiftly rather than wait for Lumian Lee to weaken gradually. Thus, he opted for Sun Ray instead of Weakening Ray.

At laser speed, Sun Ray struck the crimson fireball, melting a substantial hole into it.

The fireball lost its structural integrity and exploded, scattering like rain.

Yet, Lumian was nowhere among the remnants. He seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Simultaneously, behind Ultraman Lato Guiaro, Lumian's figure, adorned with the Lie earring, swiftly materialized.

Initially, Lumian transformed into a fireball and soared towards Lato Guiaro, intending to force him into using Beyonder powers and counterattack. This allowed him to "fix" his original location, not shifting prematurely, creating an opportunity to "teleport" behind the target in the fireball state for a surprise attack.

Having faced bestowed of the sea before, Lumian was aware of Lato Guiaro's ability to manipulate the weight or floatation of objects using the power of the land and stars, altering their speed.

To successfully use Spirit World Traversal in his fireball form, Lumian borrowed Lie's Flame Controlling ability.

As his figure materialized, he promptly opened his mouth and

hissed at Ultraman Lato Guiaro, less than two meters away.
"Ha!"
A pale-yellow beam, resembling gas, shot towards the April Fool's key member.
Lato Guiaro didn't have time to turn around, sensing the impending danger through his fate perception, a skill obtained from deciphering the Language of the Stars Beyonder powers.
Specks of starlight emerged in his eyes. He identified several "passages" in the silver hall suffused with cerulean-blue gasses, imperceptible to ordinary humans. Hastily choosing one, he pounced over—a navigating ability bestowed by the sea.
Simultaneously, uncertain of evading the attack from behind, Lato Guiaro infused the surroundings with layers of golden light.
This was the Purification Halo of a Sequence 5 Priest of Light of the Sun pathway.
Amidst the harrumph, the pale-yellow beam swept past Lato Guiaro's back, hidden somewhere in the void.
The key member of April Fool's, code name Ultraman, fainted, but his momentum remained. He continued into the illusory passageway, hidden from ordinary eyes, traversing space and dimensions.
Lumian, within two meters, couldn't "teleport" away in time and was enveloped by the Purification Halo.
His heart ached, as if something sought to tear his body apart and crawl out.
Faintly, he heard the illusory ravings of the entity known as Inevitability, Mr. Fool, or both.
Unclear but unsettling, they made Lumian's brain feel pulled out of his skull by an invisible hand.
Despite an Ascetic's endurance, Lumian couldn't help but groan in pain. Collapsing to the ground, he curled up.
A similar experience occurred in his Cordu dream, a reaction after being sprinkled by Valentine's holy water. Lato Guiaro's Purification Halo, an advanced Sun Halo, had evolved from harmless to a partial Sun Holy Water effect. It could exorcize evil spirits and purify the evil power within a target's body.
As Lato Guiaro lay unconscious, the Purification Halo vanished in a flash, only partially dispelling the poisonous gas.
Similarly, the unconscious Lato Guiaro couldn't progress through the illusory passageway, breaking free and falling three to four meters in front of Lumian. The impact left him in pain, slowly regaining consciousness.
At that moment, Lumian slowly recovered from the intense pain induced by the Purification Halo.

Lato Guiaro, just waking up and still uncertain of the situation, instinctively re-entered the illusory passageway to increase the distance between himself and Lumian Lee. This move aimed to avoid another strike from Lumian's Psychic Piercing-like ability or any other unforeseen attacks.
Upon crawling back to the hall through the exit of the illusory passageway, Lumian had already raised his head and regained his composure, though his forehead was soaked in cold sweat.
Observing this, Lato Guiaro felt neither pity, disappointment, nor regret. Instead, he was pleasantly surprised.
It's effective!
Purification Halo is effective against Lumian Lee!
After confirming that the adventurer Louis Berry was indeed Lumian Lee, Lato Guiaro contemplated how to strategize if he were to engage in a battle with him.
It was simple with the authority of the Governor of the Sea. He could repeatedly cast the other party into the Cosmic Void, making him lose himself over and over. Without the Governor of the Sea's authority, he had to consider how to exploit Lumian Lee's vulnerabilities.
Lumian Lee's unique characteristics were clear—possessing a sealing power of the same origin as the Celestial Worthy, with a high-ranking creature sealed within him.
Beyonders in this state often had false high-level statuses and enjoyed numerous conveniences, but they were susceptible to the Sun pathway's abilities.
Lato Guiaro wasn't certain about the effectiveness of the Sun Halo, Cleave of Purification, and other abilities, nor was he sure of the Purification Halo's potency. The only certainty lay in the effectiveness of the Sun Holy Water he could create.
Therefore, if the Purification Halo proved ineffective against Lumian Lee, he would swiftly produce Sun Holy Water and sprinkle it on him.
Looking at Lumian, Lato Guiaro smiled, once again dyeing the surroundings golden as layer after layer spread out.
This sealed environment was ideal for employing the Purification Halo. It denied Lumian Lee a chance to distance himself or "teleport" closer. The entire hall was essentially enveloped by the Purification Halo!
Furthermore, in the spaceship, there was no fear of Lumian Lee losing control and transforming into a monster, unleashing the high-level creature within his body. An intruder at this level would inevitably trigger the spaceship's automatic defense system targeting him. Lato Guiaro might then seize control of the

spaceship!
Didn't your sister tell you something Emperor Roselle once said?
If you rely on something to obtain specialness and become stronger, you will definitely be punished because of it!
Upon seeing the surging layers of golden light, Lumian raised his right hand and vanished.
Where is he "teleporting" to this time? As long as he's in the hall, he can't avoid the Purification Halo! Lato Guiaro watched the other party's struggle with certainty and a smile.
Unless Lumian Lee chose to leave the hall, it was impossible for him not to be affected by the Purification Halo. With the spaceship's barrier raised, the door closed, and the place sealed, and using the unique power of the sea, if he wanted to "teleport" out, he had to first destroy the surrounding walls or metal doors to create an exit.
This was also advantageous for Lato Guiaro.
No one knew what the spaceship would unleash in this hall next!
Layer after layer of Purification Halos rapidly "drowned" Lumian's original location, but nothing happened. Lumian's figure was nowhere to be seen in the silver-white hall.
Wh... Lato Guiaro's pupils constricted.
Where did Lumian Lee go?
Is his teleportation ability unaffected by the sealed interior of the spaceship?
Or has he gone into hiding?
Lato Guiaro's heart skipped a beat; he extended his right hand and pulled.
The void in the hall stirred, unveiling an abnormal area nestled between two walls, flanked by dark holes emitting cerulean-blue gas.
Creating an unstable space and hiding inside to avoid the Purification Halo? That's true. The Purification Halo's purpose is to exorcize, purify, warm, and provide courage. Without substantial offensive power, it can't destroy the structure of that space... Lumian Lee actually possesses such an ability. Lato Guiaro quickly saw through Lumian's trick. Calmly raising his right hand, he condensed a penetrating dark-green ray.
Simultaneously, he harnessed his basic control over gravity to pull at the fabricated space.
The dark-green ray struck the spot where it had been pulled, instantly penetrating and obliterating the structure.
Silently shattered, the dark-green ray continued forward, hitting a silver-
white full-body armor with its back turned to Lato Guiaro.

The dark-green ray, now weakened to a certain extent, faded away.
The silver-white full-body armor suddenly pivoted, and two pairs of eyes appeared to lock onto Lato Guiaro from within the vacant helmet.
In the next moment, it charged toward the April Fool's key member, forming a broadsword of light in its hand.
As the silver-white full-body armor rushed out, Lumian's figure emerged in the corner.
He had utilized the terrain there to arrange a simple Bottle of Fiction, using the large hole that emitted poisonous gas as a symbolic window. His goal was twofold: first, to evade the influence of the Purification Halo, and second, to position the Pride Armor with its back facing Lato Guiaro.
Yes, this cursed armor might only target someone standing a certain distance behind it, but it might not. What if that person not only stood more than ten meters behind it but also attempted to attack it by stabbing it in the back?
The answer was clear!
Now, Lumian had a capable helper unafraid of the Purification Halo.

Chapter 585: Repeated "Betrayal"

At a distance of just over ten meters, the Pride Armor covered the ground in two powerful strides, positioning itself in front of Ultraman Lato Guiaro. A broadsword, condensed from radiant light, slashed down with deadly precision.

Lato Guiaro had a momentary opportunity to utilize his Navigator ability, escape through hidden passageways in the void and dimensions, and evade the impending attack. However, the sight of the silver-white full-body armor caught him off guard; he hadn't anticipated an aggressive move before Lumian Lee could even don the armor!

This momentary hesitation cost him. The silver-white full-body armor, resembling a relentless steam locomotive, collided with him before he could vanish into the hidden tunnel. By then, it was too late, and the looming threat of being cleaved apart became imminent—a grim fate of upper and lower halves separated.

In this dire circumstance, he was no earthworm with regenerative abilities; his fate seemed sealed.

Facing the approaching silver-white armor and its raised broadsword of light, scales formed from starlight protruded from various parts of Lato Guiaro's body.

The air quivered around him, as if an invisible tide were roaring, amplifying the tension.

As per the intel gathered on April Fool's, the power derived from the "sea" without the Governor of the Sea's authority corresponded to a Sequence 5 at most, known as Tidal Scholar—the current state of Lato Guiaro.

Enveloped by an ethereal tide, Lato Guiaro swung his fist, resembling a colossal wave crashing down.

Thud!

His formidable punch collided with the side of the broadsword of light, forcefully diverting its trajectory.

Simultaneously, Lumian materialized behind him, left hand raised.

Indeed! I knew you'd seize this chance to teleport behind me and launch a sneak attack! Lato Guiaro was ready. Evading the silver-white full-body armor's second strike, he imbued the surroundings in a warm golden hue.

Purification Halo!

As layers of golden light surged towards Lumian, he deftly twisted his left wrist.

Even before that, the silver-white Lie earring on his left earlobe emitted a subtle glow, revealing various blobs of light and colors

on Ultraman's body. Among them, a golden ball emitted a warm glow—the representation of the Purification Halo ability.
With a flick of his wrist, the golden ball detached from Ultraman's body and swiftly flew to Lumian.
Steal!
Lumian successfully "stole" Ultraman's Purification Halo!
The number of times the Ring of the Sea Queen could "steal" after the standard process remained unknown to Lumian. However, he was certain that Lie's "stealing" effect persisted for half a month, unaffected by his "stealing" of the sea's power.
After Lie's transformation on the ancestral altar in Milo Village, Lumian diligently experimented with Steal, honing his proficiency to ensure he could deploy it effectively in critical moments. Thus, he had become relatively adept at stealing and dispersing the power of the sea.
Simultaneously, Ultraman's Beyonder powers of the Sun pathway were well-
documented by the Tarot Club's information, making Lumian fully aware of what he aimed to Steal this time. With a solid foundation in mysticism knowledge, he felt prepared.
However, the challenge lay in his lack of experience "stealing" a Priest of Light's abilities. He feared that locating the corresponding symbols for Purification Halo and Holy Water Creation might take too long, leaving him vulnerable to Lato Guiaro's attacks.
Anticipating the Pride Armor's frontal assault, Lumian strategically teleported four to five meters behind Lato Guiaro, enticing him to use Purification Halo.
The distinction between the abilities Lumian used and those he refrained from was clear, providing him with instant recognition.
Before initiating the teleport, he activated the Lie earring and raised his left hand, ensuring he didn't linger in the dangerous area for a moment longer.
The Purification Halo, despite being "stolen," persisted and continued to surge, enveloping Lumian.
However, it didn't reach its intended target. A formidable formless force emanated from Lumian's body, acting as a barrier that thwarted the encroaching halo.
The power of the sea!
You have the power of the sea, and so do I!
During the Steal process, Lumian had reserved a portion of the sea's power for himself. Although not on par with Ultraman's, it proved sufficient to repel the Purification Halo for a brief moment.
Calmly activating the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian vanished from the warm golden area, teleporting to the farthest

corner from Lato Guiaro.
The Purification Halo pursued relentlessly, but it reached its limit, visibly weakening.
Reacting swiftly, Lumian harnessed the power of the sea once more, watching as the warm golden barrier rapidly dissipated.
Meanwhile, Lato Guiaro's heart skipped a beat.
Intuitively, he sensed the loss of his Purification Halo ability, suspecting it had been "stolen"!
Lumian Lee's item with the Steal effect is still operational? Lato Guiaro couldn't dwell on it. Dodging the Pride Armor's heavy slashes, he fell to the ground, rolling to evade the attacks. Facing the sky, he raised his right hand, clenching it.
Pure and blazing sunlight condensed rapidly, forming a thick ray that struck the silver-white armor's chest.
It paused momentarily, unable to penetrate, only burning and dissolving into tottering black marks.
Witnessing this and recognizing Lumian Lee as his adversary, Ultraman Lato Guiaro entertained the idea of fleeing. He decided to disengage, cease the confrontation, and seek an escape route.
At that critical moment, instead of launching a barrage of attacks, the Pride Armor shifted its focus toward Lumian.
Lumian, who had previously utilized Spirit World Traversal on the betrothal ship and within the hall, found himself affected once again by the Purification Halo. His spirituality teetered on the brink of depletion, leaving him visibly fatigued and weakened.
Any ordinary human in such a state near the Pride Armor would face indiscriminate attacks.
Wh... Lato Guiaro keenly perceived the shift in dynamics.
Though unaware of the specifics, he sensed an advantage.
Rising abruptly, he directed his attention to Lumian.
In the next instant, the Pride Armor raised its radiant broadsword and charged towards Lumian.
Haha, your Sealed Artifact has betrayed you! Lato Guiaro mocked internally as he closed in, intending to exploit the silver-white full-body armor's attack to create Sun Holy Water and sprinkle it on Lumian Lee.
Undeterred, Lumian took a resolute step forward.
Tapping into his Ascetic powers, the accumulated strength and spirituality within his body surged, replenishing his drained spirit.
His body underwent a sudden transformation, growing by seven to eight centimeters and bulking up by two sizes, causing his loosely fitting deputy host's robe to strain.
The advancing Pride Armor abruptly halted, pivoting to face Lato Guiaro, who had followed closely.

Lato Guiaro's pupils contracted, and an instant heaviness enveloped his body, bringing him to a natural halt.
Simultaneously, his gaze locked onto the unusually tall figure of Lumian Lee.
The enemy teleported right in front of him, mere inches away. Their eyes locked, reflecting each other in an intense confrontation.
With a swift whoosh, Lumian swung his right hand, adorned with the Flog boxing gloves, through the air.
Lato Guiaro's "heavy" state naturally exerted a suction force on his surroundings, a downgraded version of the humanoid Sealed Artifact's characteristic. Lumian's punch encountered no repulsion; instead, it accelerated towards its target.
Unperturbed by the close-range attacks, Lato Guiaro harbored concerns about Lumian's Psychic Piercing ability. Unable to dodge or employ other abilities in time, he unleashed a retaliatory fist resembling a thousand tonnes of seawater, causing the sound of surging tides to echo.
Bang!
Lato Guiaro blocked Lumian's attack and swiftly rolled to the side, evading a surprise assault from the Pride Armor.
At that moment, a strong sense of greed surged within him, overshadowing his initial plan to escape.
Seizing the opportunity, Lumian retreated and retrieved a black bone flute with red holes from his Traveler's Bag.
Symphony of Hatred!
While Lato Guiaro resisted the Pride Armor, Lumian brought the flute to his mouth and played a sharp, intense melody.
Lato Guiaro's mind buzzed, freezing him in place.
Bright blood oozed from the cracks in the starlight scales on his body.
Emotional Detonation!
Pfft! The Pride Armor struck Lato Guiaro's shoulder, splintering scales, bone, and flesh.
Closing the distance with two brisk strides, Lumian approached the nearly collapsed Lato Guiaro, his face twisted in pain. He raised the black bone flute in his hand.
In the moment that Lato Guiaro used the pain from the Pride Armor strike to break free from the detonated emotions, he witnessed Lumian Lee thrusting the bone flute toward him with a fierce expression.
Pfft!
The bone flute effortlessly pierced Lato Guiaro's left eye, akin to cutting through butter.

The eyeball of April Fool's key member exploded, and a gruesome mix of blood and other fluids streamed out through the gaps in the black bone flute.

Even if the Symphony of Hatred only struck an ordinary part, it was tantamount to hitting a vital point. Striking a true vital point meant either instant death or a prolonged period of social death. In this case, Lato Guiaro's left eye and brain were undeniably vital points.

His remaining eye widened and protruded, life force rapidly draining as he slumped to the ground.

Lumian seized Ultraman's neck, lifting him up. Releasing his right hand, which held the black bone flute, he delivered a heavy slap to Lato Guiaro's face. With a fierce expression, he growled in Intisian, "Did you go to Cordu Village to confirm the situation?"

Chapter 586: Gnawing

Ultraman Lato Guiaro, his life rapidly slipping away, fell into a daze. Even his thoughts of self-preservation became blurred.

In the haze, he vaguely saw Juan Oro, the wrinkled old man, standing in the middle of the sea, waving with a mix of joy and mockery.

At that moment, Lumian's voice resonated from the horizon, faint, ethereal, and elusive.

"Did you go to Cordu Village to confirm the situation?"

Cordu Village? The time Mad Lady and I visited Nolfi, and went there just out of convenience? Lato Guiaro lost focus, and Lumian's figure reflected in his closed eye.

With the intent to annoy, he spoke his last words in Highlander.

"I've been there... with Mad Lady. It was... simply for fun... but Loki... seemed to... have ulterior..."

Don't you want to know what happened back then? Sure, I'll speak in Highlander. It's your problem if you don't understand. Your fault for not taking this language seriously in the past!

Lato Guiaro knew his actions wouldn't practically affect Lumian Lee. This was because Lumian Lee could find someone to perform dream divination, hypnosis, or undergo a real dream when he returned. From there, he could memorize the Highlander he spoke and find a way to translate it into Intisian or ancient Feysac.

Still, he just wanted to annoy the other party. About to die, he couldn't care less about future developments.

"Motives..." Lato Guiaro uttered his last word as his life extinguished.

In that final moment, he seemed to hear Lumian Lee speaking to him in Highlander, "Thank you."

The "thank you" flowed naturally, carrying a strong sense of mockery.

Ultraman Lato Guiaro's intact eye bulged even more, his expression freezing on his face, his breath coming to a complete halt.

Lumian's right hand gripped the Symphony of Hatred once more. Simultaneously, he released his left hand, watching Ultraman's key member's head rapidly detach from the black bone flute with red holes, revealing a sinister and deep blood-red hole.

Thud!

Ultraman collapsed to the ground. The sticky blood on the black bone flute coalesced and dripped onto his body.

After the person who had backstabbed it suffered a fatal wound, Pride Armor stopped moving and stood nearby, resembling an ordinary silver-white full-

body armor without any special characteristics.
Loki had ulterior motives? A motive other than helping the Sinners and pulling a prank? As Lumian recalled Ultraman's confession before his death, he bent down to check what items this April Fool's key member had.
Of course, he didn't hold much hope. Ultraman Lato Guiaro had disguised himself as the incoming Governor of the Sea, Simon Guiaro, to board the betrothal ship. Carrying no items, his belongings should have been handed over to Mad Lady, allowing her to conceal them using flesh and blood magic in his stomach. However, Mad Lady clearly didn't have the time or opportunity to return the items to Ultraman.
This was one of the reasons why Lumian could eliminate Ultraman, a powerful dual pathway Beyonder, in such a short period.
If Juan Oro hadn't tipped off the sea spawn on the bridal boat beforehand, Lumian would've been forced to stash his Traveler's Bag temporarily with Mr. K.
At that moment, Lumian observed a strange transformation in the corpse of Ultraman Lato Guiaro.
It swiftly faded, morphing into a semi-translucent, semi-flesh state. Then, like it was being disintegrated by countless tiny creatures, it oozed into the silver metal floor and gradually vanished.
Soon, the remnants of flesh, starlight, and sun-like fragments left by Lato Guiaro were absorbed by the silver metallic floor, leaving behind only a Sea Governor ceremonial robe, shrouded in a faint grayish-white fog.
In the blink of an eye, the grayish-white fog got absorbed by the silver metallic floor and the mysterious structure.
Lumian attempted unsuccessfully to "reclaim" something.
Is this what it means to return to the sea? But why did this peculiar structure absorb the Priest of Light's Beyonder characteristic? Just as Lumian pondered, the sound of metal grinding surrounded him.
The pitch-black holes in the surrounding walls, ceiling, and floor once again got concealed by rotating, protruding metal. No more cerulean-blue poisonous gas spewed out, saving Lumian the energy to engulf his body in a layer of crimson, almost white flames.
Amidst the clanking sounds, two metallic doors ascended, revealing two tunnels leading to different destinations.
With the target of the betrayal now gone, the silver-gray behemoth reverted to its "normal" state.
Lumian peered into the depths of the tunnel ahead, his heart

involuntarily racing.
Badump! Badump! He felt inexplicably nervous and uneasy.
...
In Port Santa, the apartment Loki was hiding.
The moment Ludwig declared, "I'm hungry," he swiftly bowed his head and sank his teeth into Loki's hand, gripping the gemstone bracelet as if devouring the marrow from a chicken wing.
An intense wave of pain surged through Loki's mind. His immediate instinct was to deploy Paper Figurine Substitutes, a desperate attempt to break free from the current situation.
Yet, he hesitated, fearing that such a move might create an insurmountable distance between him and the sealed demigod, eliminating any chance of regaining control.
Amidst the gruesome symphony of bones crunching and flesh tearing, Loki snatched the falling gemstone bracelet with his free hand and forcibly pried open his mouth.
Bang!
A rush of air slammed into Ludwig's head, akin to a bullet fired from the latest steam rifle, ripping through flesh and hair to reveal a ghastly white skull.
However, Ludwig remained unfazed. Gnawing on Loki's left hand, he had already severed five fingers and devoured half of the palm.
Bang! Bang! Bang! Air Bullets relentlessly pounded the boy, leaving him mangled and disfigured. Yet, Ludwig persisted in his attentive nibbling on Loki.
Crack, crack.
He had already crunched down on the other party's wrist bone, a crisp sound echoing through their intertwined flesh.
As Loki nearly blacked out from the pain, he roughly grasped what was happening.
The sealed demigod possessed incredible vitality. Ordinary attacks and Beyonder powers couldn't cause significant harm. In simpler terms, he could put him to sleep or manipulate his Spirit Body Threads to knock him out, but killing him with regular means proved challenging. It couldn't even seriously injure him.
In such circumstances, even if the sealed demigod couldn't utilize any abilities, lacking sufficient strength and speed, merely devouring the other party's flesh and bones with all his might posed an abnormal challenge for many Mid-Sequence Beyonders.
Loki abandoned the idea of retrieving other mystical items and substituted himself with a paper figurine.
Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Ludwig, his head covered in signs of Air Bullet destruction and almost devoid of human form, raised his head. Beside his bloodstained mouth was a piece of white paper

that quickly swept into his mouth alongside the blood-colored flesh.
Ludwig's eyes reflected Loki's outline in the corner of the room. Something beneath his torn skin and flesh seemed to squirm slowly, attempting to break free, but to no avail.
Loki assessed the situation and the items on him. With the Soul Assurer marionette unable to return in time, he sensibly chose not to confront the sealed demigod creature. He would flee first before considering the future.
At that moment, a crimson moonlight streamed through the window.
The moonlight bathed the apartment, wrapping around Loki.
Loki heard a fleeting voice.
"A strong smell of blood..."
As the moonlight faded, a grayish-white and pitch-black paper figurine appeared on the ground.
Loki's figure materialized a few hundred meters away, outside a vine forest.
It was a boon bestowed by the Celestial Worthy during a prayer some weeks before this operation. It had been attached to a pre-prepared paper figurine, forming such a potent substitute that bordered on godhood.
Drip, drip. Blood still dripped from Loki's bitten left wrist.
He activated the diamond on the bracelet and swiftly faded away, preparing to teleport.
...
Port Santa, Milo Village.
Tap, tap, tap.
The soft patter of footsteps reverberated in Bard's ears, causing him to tense.
Bard surveyed his surroundings, finding nothing amiss.
He sprinted, weaving through several buildings, yet the rhythmic tapping of footsteps persisted behind him.
Attempting to force open a door and seek refuge in a villager's house in Milo Village,
Bard was met with an unexpected sight. Instead of the familiar kitchen, tables, chairs, and household items, his eyes beheld a decrepit stone platform enveloped in darkness.
The stone platform! Bard's pupils widened, as if he had entered an unreal illusion.
He found himself back at the residence of the Governor of the Sea and the altar where Milo Village's inhabitants paid homage to their ancestor.
Something crawled out from a crack in the worn stone platform.

A translucent worm, adorned with multiple rings, swiftly expanded, transforming into a young man donned in the attire of a sea prayer ritual's deputy host, monocle in place.
Seated on the weathered stone platform, the man grinned at Bard.
"Do you comprehend?"
Bard suddenly grasped the meaning behind the question. Swallowing hard, he replied, "Understood."
Since the altar had an owner and Beyonder creatures residing there, the so-
called rule that it could only be enchanted once a year for the Ring of the Sea Queen clearly didn't hold true!
The other party could affix the power as many times as desired!
The young man, clad in a dark-blue deputy host's sacrificial robe, toyed with the monocle in his right eye and smirked.
"Over a millennium, I've molded the rule that the Steal ability can only be conferred once a year. Little did I expect to deceive you all in the end."

Chapter 587: "Deceived"

Upon hearing the young man's words, Bard felt his blood rush to his head.

Crafting a seemingly valid rule over a millennium to deceive others?

What kind of lame antique Swindler is this?

Bard blurted out, "The patterns on the altar and the surrounding arrangements are also fake?"

The young man in the dark-blue deputy host robe chuckled.

"If it wasn't real, would you have been deceived?

"Furthermore, I occasionally venture out. When I do, it grants Steal powers on my behalf. Of course, with the spirituality produced by the surrounding worshippers, it can indeed only bestow once a year."

As the young man spoke, the smile on his face widened.

Bard's forehead throbbed as he listened, feeling like he had been mocked.

According to the other party's claim that the Steal powers could be bestowed at will, the Ring of the Sea Queen should have been complete and equipped with all its functions. So, why did the success of the sea prayer ritual experience such a significant delay?

Unable to comprehend the situation, Bard turned around and sprinted towards the exit.

It wasn't that he hadn't considered begging for mercy and surrendering on the spot, but these things could be done later. For now, he wanted to take a gamble, betting that the other party's claim of occasionally venturing out was a lie. In essence, he believed he was trapped in the altar, unable to venture anywhere and influence the people around him. If he allowed himself to be intimidated and didn't dare to escape, he would fall into the other party's trap, cheated of his freedom and future.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Bard reached the staircase in a few steps and ran up.

The more he ran, the happier he became. The monocle-wearing young man didn't stop him.

I made the right bet!

He's the core of that altar. There's no way to leave!

Thud! Thud! Thud! Bard witnessed the scene on the first floor illuminated by sunlight.

Amidst his ecstasy, his thoughts suddenly shattered. He felt the darkness around him being pierced by the light, shattering into pieces.

Bard bolted upright, alarmed to find himself lying in the servant's room at the Governor of the Sea's residence. He hadn't left.
He surveyed his surroundings and heard cheers and crackers from outside.
I just had a dream? Did it stem from a spirituality warning, helping me discover a problem with the plan? As Bard pondered these thoughts, he immediately dismissed the corresponding judgment. No, how could I have fallen asleep during the sea prayer ritual? Did I start dreaming after hearing soft footsteps in my room?
Bard rolled to his feet, slung his backpack over his shoulders, and tentatively pushed open the door, entering the corridor.
No longer smug with the plan that required minimal risks or combat, Bard realized he couldn't share in the distribution of items. He couldn't teleport away directly, nor could he return to his original appearance or disguise himself as someone else.
Upon reaching the corridor, Bard noticed the Little Devils leaving the shadows and performing a strange celebratory dance.
He hadn't "communicated" with these sea spawn and knew their intelligence was roughly equivalent to that of ordinary dogs. They could be tamed and controlled, but direct communication was beyond them. However, the amazing thing was that Little Devils had the ability to record and recreate human words, even if they weren't sure of their meanings. Moreover, they could receive signals from their collaborators within a 100-meter radius.
The Little Devils ignored Bard as well. The sea prayer ritual had succeeded. According to their prior agreement, the fake Governor of the Sea could leave on his own.
Bard left the Governor of the Sea's residence and realized that the guards at the entrance weren't kneeling to thank the boon like before. The villagers of Milo Village at the docks were the same. Apart from a few who sincerely shouted that the sea prayer ritual had succeeded, the rest merely echoed what was happening and expressed their joy, with many preferring to release crackers.
Indeed, it was a dream. The villagers' reactions in the dream were too exaggerated... I should know that based on past experiences with sea prayer rituals, only the committee members of the Fisheries Guild and a few people with strong sea bloodlines can sense the arrival of the sea's boon. Others with sea bloodlines wouldn't have a tangible sense. They'd slowly realize they've become stronger, or the changes are too weak to detect. Otherwise, the failure of the sea prayer ritual last year wouldn't have escaped the notice of Port Santa's citizens and would have only circulated within the core circle. Bard used the environment to quickly

confirm the essence of his previous encounter.
He didn't dare relax, nor did he "again" head to the docks to admire the villagers being fooled. Instead, he turned to the road leading to Port Santa's city district.
Just as he stepped out of the ancient village, Bard spotted a figure ahead.
The man stood over 2.4 meters tall, clad in a simple linen robe and a hood, holding a thick staff.
"Gandalf..." Bard's heart tightened as he shouted.
With the dream just now, he thought he had been exposed, so he didn't pull off any act.
Gandalf, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, was taken aback and let out a deep chuckle.
"You're really fake."
H-he's not sure of my identity? Bard was taken aback, wishing he could slap himself.
...
Inside the underwater spaceship, in a metallic room reminiscent of a beehive.
Having failed to capture Mad Lady twice in a row, Mr. K's body underwent a sudden transformation, expanding to nearly three meters in height.
Fortunately, he wasn't adorned in actual clothes. The blood-colored cloak draped over him had morphed from his flesh and blood. Otherwise, even the loose robe would have succumbed to the drastic change.
Concurrently, Mr. K's skin darkened, assuming the appearance of thick and formidable armor. Crooked goat horns adorned with sinister patterns sprouted from his head, and a pair of bat-like wings, encircled in crimson and blue flames, emerged from his back.
A pungent smell of sulfur hung in the air.
Being a Sequence 5 Shepherd of the Secrets Suppliant pathway, Mr. K possessed the core ability of Grazing. This allowed him to fuse other people's souls with Beyonder characteristics or boon powers and utilize them uniquely. It was akin to grazing lambs for a deity.
Each Shepherd could graze up to seven souls, controlling only one at a time. In this state, Shepherds could employ their Beyonder abilities and three abilities corresponding to the souls. These were chosen during Grazing and remained fixed thereafter.
The most formidable aspect of Shepherds was their ability to Graze demigod-
level spirits, enabling them to contend with Saints for a limited duration.

Presently, Mr. K was using a Grazed Devil. He had selected Devil Transformation, Sulphur Fireball, and Sword of Lava in the past.
Mr. K deliberately chose to forgo Devil's most distinctive Danger Premonition because he believed it to be effective only when commanding the Devil's spirit. Under normal circumstances, he couldn't activate Grazing continuously. In any case, if grave danger loomed, a divine revelation would be provided by God. Failure to receive such guidance indicated wrongdoing, warranting divine punishment.
As the expansive bat wings on Mr. K's back unfolded, light-blue fireballs condensed, numbering almost twenty.
They indiscriminately bombarded every corner of the metallic beehive, creating an all-encompassing barrage to counter Mad Lady's elusive "flashes" throughout the space.
Rumble!
The explosion, a mix of fire and poison, wreaked havoc on the metallic hive, tearing apart the incubating Batings Black Insect, Little Devils, and other creatures.
Mad Lady abruptly halted as the Sulfur Fireball condensed.
Cloaked in a blood-colored dress, with grotesque flesh lumps on her face, an illusory, slowly flipping book materialized in her eyes. Faint recitations echoed around her.
Drawing a dagger, she genuflected and drove it into the metal floor of the hive.
Dawn-like light ascended, forming an almost invisible wall around her.
Rumble!
The shockwaves from the Sulfur Fireball's explosion and the poisonous pale-
blue fireball relentlessly struck the invisible barrier, causing it to sway, yet it stood resilient.
This was Protection of a Warrior Sequence 5.
Record, the core ability of a Sequence 6 Scribe of the Apprentice pathway, allowed the "recording" of others' abilities for use, each recording usable only once. Scribes could even record Beyonder powers with godhood effects, but the success rate was minimal.
After the explosion's aftershocks subsided, Mr. K, donned in a blood-colored cloak and resembling a colossal Devil, wielded a broadsword composed of crimson lava and pale-blue flames. He surged towards Mad Lady in two steps, slashing down.
The nearly invisible wall around Mad Lady couldn't withstand the onslaught and finally shattered. As the illusory book in her eyes flipped, a robust and sharp Sword of Dawn materialized in her hand.

Excitedly, she swung her two-handed light sword.
Clang!
Mr. K's strike sent Mad Lady, lacking a Warrior's physique and strength, flying.
Though Mr. K hadn't anticipated her determination to engage in close combat despite her limitations, the battle's tempo remained unaffected. He advanced, wielding the lava broadsword once again.
Poof! The Mad Lady he struck suddenly thinned, transforming into a paper figurine consumed by sulfurous flames.
Paper Figurine Substitutes!
Mad Lady reappeared beside a demolished metal hive, her illusory book flipping once more.
She then stretched her arms, allowing a pure and magnificent blazing pillar of light to descend from the sky and strike Mr. K, who had attacked the paper effigy.
Priest of Light's Light of Holiness!

Chapter 588: Degree of Madness

Mr. K shifted instantaneously, tapping into the Grazed Traveler's soul. His eyes took on an otherworldly glow, as if concealing doors to different realms.

His form faded, and in an instant, a luminous white column surrounded by flames emerged, shrouding him within its fiery embrace.

In the ensuing moment, Mr. K, stripped of his Devil guise, materialized in a corner of the metallic beehive. His form liquefied, his flesh resembling dripping candle wax.

The Secrets Suppliant pathway symbolized corruption, its influence curtailed by the Sun pathway's capabilities.

Half-melted flesh and blood cascaded onto the metal floor, seeping into it in a bizarre manner. Soon, it was absorbed by the spaceship Mad Lady had earlier detailed. Even Mr. K felt the weight of an unseen force, as if an invisible hand pressed him down. His attempts to extricate himself from the metallic floor proved futile, and he continued sinking gradually.

Mad Lady, with grayish-green eyes gleaming, teleported near Mr. K.

Despite his blood-colored wax-drenched visage, Mr. K faced Mad Lady without a trace of fear. His focus remained fixed on the evil god's aura emanating from the metal hive—his ultimate target.

He switched the Grazed soul to an Arbiter pathway Beyonder, with two bolts of lightning gathering in the depths of his darkened eyes.

Psychic Piercing!

Mad Lady refrained from teleporting. The illusory book within her eyes flipped open, revealing the kaleidoscope of colors on Mr. K's body and the shifting hues of light during his Grazed soul transitions.

Excitement illuminated Mad Lady's face. Raising her right hand, she prepared to delicately twist it clockwise.

Steal!

This was an ability she had Recorded from Bard.

A sudden, intriguing notion captivated Mad Lady's thoughts—she yearned to witness the aftermath of stealing the Grazing ability from a Shepherd.

It was crucial to understand that her Steal ability was limited to just one from a target, devoid of any connections to the abilities that came with it. In essence, after snatching the Grazing ability, the soul, characteristics, and powers under Grazing's influence would persist within Mr. K's body.

In this state, Mad Lady pondered whether Shepherds would

grapple with internal conflicts, the fusion of characteristics, or a loss of control akin to the switching between non-adjacent pathways.
Excitement bubbled within Mad Lady as she deliberately Blinked near Mr. K, compelling him to switch Grazed souls. She observed keenly, eager to discern which light aligned with Grazing.
As for Mr. K's reaction, she cared little.
You continue your fight; I continue my steal. Whoever dies first loses!
Simultaneously, the metal floor, saturated with Mr. K's flesh, quivered unexpectedly. A previously concealed door within the metal hive withdrew, unveiling a passageway that hinted at a silver metallic hall beyond.
A formidable suction force emanated from that direction. While her attempt to steal Mr. K's Grazing ability was underway, Mad Lady—lacking the strength—was propelled into the air. Dark-blond hair whipped around wildly as she soared toward the origin of the anomaly.
Meanwhile, Mr. K remained "locked" to the metal floor. Though his body swayed precariously, on the verge of being pulled away, he held his ground, unsteady yet resilient.
The face of the blood-colored wax-streaked Aurora Order Oracle betrayed an anxious expression.
The enemy was on the verge of escape!
The source of the evil god corruption had revealed itself!
Mr. K swiftly switched back to the corresponding Devil spirit, summoning a broadsword forged from crimson lava and pale-blue flames. Targeting his body adhered to the metal floor, he executed a slashing motion.
Beneath his calf, flesh promptly separated from his main body, the incision undergoing a mesmerizing melding of half-melting and half-reforming.
Having relinquished a portion of his flesh, Mr. K allowed pale-white, moist, and freshly-formed limbs to squirm out from the severed stump. Concurrently, he harnessed the formidable suction force to pursue Mad Lady and draw closer to the source of corruption.
In midair, he witnessed Lumian, disguised, clutching the door frame in a struggle against the menacing suction. He observed the motionless silver-
white full-body armor seamlessly blending with the floor.
Mad Lady surged ahead, on the verge of "flying" past Lumian.
With a wave of her right hand, she emitted a greeting-like "hello", her face radiating excitement and anticipation.

Lumian's pupils constricted. Disregarding his precarious state, he harrumphed.
Two beams of white light shot forth from his nostrils, accurately aimed at Mad Lady but influenced by the tangible and enigmatic suction force. They bent and "plunged" deeper into the tunnel.
At that moment, Lumian's grip on the silver metal door frame neared its breaking point, blood seeping from the strain.
Faintly, he sensed an abundance of flesh and skin deep within the tunnel, intertwining to shape a colossal structure resembling a pear-shaped bird's nest.
Suspended in midair, fleshy ropes, as thick as two or three adult arms and covered in a translucent membrane, extended, linking the distant wall, the ceiling above, and the metal on the ground.
Within these flesh and blood tendrils, specks of starlight and a mysterious dark substance flowed into the massive pear-shaped object.
The bird's nest-like structure was contracting inward, its various parts deeply sunken, delineating lines that hinted at a substantial disk.
The terrifying suction force, capable of manipulating both reality and mystery, emanated from this pear-shaped object composed of skin, flesh, and blood.
At that moment, the outlines on the pear-shaped object quivered, and all the indentations bulged and expanded.
With this transformation, fragments of starlight spilled from the fleshy bird's nest, rushing into every cabin within the spaceship.
This event resembled the prior two releases of the sea's power, yet lacked the grandeur and vastness, lacking the potential to rend apart anyone obstructing its path.
Lumian could already envision the repetitive expulsion, understanding that the silver-gray behemoth had amassed a power capable of threatening the seal. Year after year, it required the extraction of this accumulated pressure.
As the abundance of starlight scattered, the formidable suction force dissipated.
With two thuds, Mad Lady and Mr. K collided with the ground. One found herself in the tunnel leading to the fleshy "bird's nest," while the other lay in the silver hall where Lumian and Ultraman had previously battled.
Lumian released his grip, landing on the ground. His gaze swiftly fixated on the April Fool's key member, adorned with clumps of flesh and blood on her face.
Mad Lady sprang up, exclaiming to him and Mr. K, "Did you see that? Did you see that? That's an incubating deity. Yes, it should be

a deity!"
Despite the intense fluctuations in Mad Lady's emotions, Mr. K discerned no sincerity in her tone.
Her mention of "deity" sounded more like "powerful and terrifying monster," a mere description.
In the next instant, Lumian materialized behind Mad Lady, who promptly vanished on the spot, "Blinking" closer to where the starlight had scattered.
Lumian, sensing danger instinctively, felt his heart quicken involuntarily.
He hesitated to delve too deeply into the tunnel, avoiding proximity to the flesh and blood "bird's nest" he had vaguely "seen" before. Unimaginable horrors were certain to unfold.
However, Mad Lady sprinted in that direction.
Let her venture deeper and potentially meet her end? Lumian's thoughts raced, torn between decisions.
Another second passed, and Mr. K teleported in front of Lumian, fervently pursuing Mad Lady.
In that moment, Lumian, who had often considered himself a bit eccentric, found himself yearning for a bit more normalcy from the duo ahead of him.
While he could comprehend Mr. K's choices and actions—rooted in unwavering faith in God and the pursuit of divine will, coupled with a hint of extremism—Mad Lady's conduct exceeded his expectations.
Drawing from I Know Someone's confession and Mad Lady's previous behavior, Lumian detected no signs of her fanatical devotion to the Celestial Worthy. Simultaneously, due to the ongoing conflict between the Celestial Worthy and Mr. Fool, she couldn't always rely on protection.
This raised a question for Lumian.
If Mad Lady consistently courted danger, how had she managed to survive to this day?
April Fool's lacked the strict hierarchy and coordination seen in the Aurora Order. Most of the time, members operated independently with minimal interaction. Protecting Mad Lady from the start, allowing her to grow steadily with such a mindset, seemed implausible.
Could it be that I Know Someone had once overseen the treatment of Mad Lady's mental and psychological issues? After his demise, did Mad Lady's problems exacerbate? Lumian quickly formulated a plausible explanation, but considering Mad Lady's conduct on the betrothal ship, her current state struck him as abnormal.
On the betrothal ship, faced with the impending release of the

sea's power in the energy passageway, Mad Lady, though eager and seeking excitement, had an escape route. As long as she didn't delay until the last moment, she could teleport away, avoiding the actual risk of death.

Now, whatever lurked in the depths of the tunnel made Lumian, despite his feigned high level, intuitively uneasy. He believed it represented an almost certain death sentence. Yet, Mad Lady persisted in her attempt to approach!

Could there be a reason compelling her to make contact with that object? Lumian wondered. He suspected that Mad Lady's actions might be part of the Celestial Worthy's scheme, convincing her that she could confront the provocation head-on and escape in time.

I can't let her and that Celestial Worthy succeed... Besides, personally, I look forward to ending her myself rather than witnessing her being swallowed by that dangerous object... Lumian's eyes narrowed, the desire to teleport forward and intercept Mad Lady compelling him.

However, preventing a Traveler from reaching a specific location in such a manner was clearly impossible. Lumian hesitated, unwilling to genuinely approach the flesh-and-blood "bird's nest" deep within the tunnel.

Suddenly, an idea struck him.

The peculiar structure's rejection of outsiders seems to have lifted, and with Lato Guiaro, a person possessing a potent sea bloodline, deceased. Could I attempt to gain temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea to halt Mad Lady's progress?

With that in mind, Lumian embarked on his endeavor.

Activating the power of the sea within him, he allowed his Astral Projection to merge and swiftly expand outward.

Chapter 589: Object Within the Nest

As Lumian's Astral Projection expanded with the power of the sea, he immediately sensed the presence of the "waters."

This wasn't a genuine ocean but a fantastical sea created by radiant starlight. At its core lay the projection of the silver-gray behemoth.

Empowered by an ample supply of the sea's power, Lumian's Astral Projection surged forward, merging seamlessly with the phantom.

A burning sensation radiated from the left side of his chest, as if some form of acknowledgment had been received.

His consciousness extended boundlessly, taking command of the dreamlike illusory sea.

In the course of this process, he glimpsed the phantoms of Juan Oro, Ultraman Lato Guiaro, and unfamiliar apparitions.

Those who have returned to the sea? They seem to have transformed into water droplets in the sea... Lumian withdrew his gaze from the joyful Juan Oro and the pained Lato Guiaro, redirecting it toward the depths of the tunnel ahead. From a considerable distance, he spotted Mad Lady.

The silver-gray behemoth harbored entities nurtured within the flesh and blood "bird's nest." With the Batings Black Insect, Little Devils, and other extraterrestrial life forms, it was inevitable that they coexisted in the spirit world. However, this spirit world was entirely severed from the external realm. Consequently, Beyonders skilled in summoning creatures from the spirit world for assistance found themselves bereft of their primary reliance. Teleportation executed through the spirit world, however, retained some semblance of normalcy. Departing directly, however, proved impossible. The only avenues were through the energy passageway at the entrance or by breaching the outer wall to connect the inner and outer spirit worlds.

Simultaneously, the closer one approached the flesh-and-blood "bird's nest," the more peculiar the spirit world became. It was as though the air gradually thickened, becoming almost tangible and impeding the approach of "birds."

In such an environment, coupled with the absence of a flesh-and-blood "bird's nest," Mad Lady found herself unable to teleport directly. Her only recourse was to Blink incrementally, expending her spirituality with each maneuver.

Having focused on Mad Lady and the space in front of her, Lumian suddenly extended his right hand and clenched it into a fist.

The air surrounding Mad Lady immediately grew dense, as if assuming a tangible form. This transformation caused the illusory

curtain to bend, compressing the corresponding area into a dark and transparent sphere.
Once more, Mad Lady's form disappeared, but a formless force, shaped by the bending area, yanked her out and sent her plummeting.
Under the authority of the Governor of the Sea, the spirit world within the sphere and the spirit world within the silver-gray behemoth were forcibly separated!
However, this effect was contingent on the peculiar environment. In the external world, given Lumian's current level and mastery of the power of the sea, completely isolating an area from the expansive and genuine spirit world proved challenging. He could merely employ Cosmic Void to create an exit path and a door symbolizing an escape route, a tactic vulnerable to counteraction by a Traveler's abilities.
Mad Lady attempted another Blink, yet found herself unable to escape the dark sphere's confines.
She halted in place, seriously contemplating her Recorded abilities and the items in her possession that might alleviate her current predicament.
Observing her struggle, Lumian couldn't suppress his yearning for demigod-
level powers.
As the temporary authority-wielding Governor of the Sea—essentially a faux demigod incapable of withstanding a single spell from the "Cinderella" demigod—Lumian had ensnared Mad Lady in an inescapable dilemma. She proved challenging even for Mr. K to subdue in a brief timeframe.
Mad Lady gazed into the depths of the metal tunnel, representing the flesh and blood "bird's nest," her face aglow with unrestrained eagerness, anticipation, and excitement.
Confined within the dark sphere, she yearned for escape, dissatisfied with her inability to reach the desired destination.
Head over there, quick! Head over there, quick!
I want to go over!
The longing in her heart intensified, nearly manifesting as a tangible desire.
The desire surged into her chest, seeking to rupture the restraints and liberate her from this predicament.
Mr. K, having switched to a Traveler's soul, swiftly caught up and saw Mad Lady.
Instinctively, an illusory book materialized in his dark eyes.
Positioned in front of Mr. K, the book flipped through its pages while chanting in a low voice, "I came, I saw, I record."

In an instant, Mr. K underwent a transformation, manifesting as a two to three-meter-tall half-giant donned in cold black armor, brandishing a dark, straight broadsword.
Having Grazed a Traveler, he had selected three Beyonder powers: Blink, Record, and the Traveler's Door, encompassing teleportation or travel. Additionally, with Record, he had acquired an ability capable of influencing godhood from a Saint of the Aurora Order. While only half as effective as the original, it proved sufficient to contend with Mad Lady, who had yet to approach the threshold of godhood.
Mr. K advanced confidently, wielding the dark, straight broadsword, prepared to strike.
At that moment, Mad Lady's chest was overwhelmed by an intense surge of desire.
Then, she experienced a sharp, piercing pain.
She didn't need to lower her head. From the corner of her eye, she witnessed the flesh on her chest tearing apart inch by inch, the white bones snapping one by one. A grayish-white fog, mingled with fragments of flesh, surged forth, coalescing into a humanoid figure resembling her. In an instant, it leaped out of the dark "sphere" created by Lumian and darted into the depths of the metal tunnel.
Don't be in a hurry to leave! Unfazed by the situation, Mad Lady's face reflected excitement and a hint of regret.
Pfft!
Mr. K's dark broadsword cleaved through the dark sphere, diagonally bisecting Mad Lady.
Wearing the ring imbued with flesh and blood magic, Mad Lady didn't succumb immediately. Her two halves of flesh and blood writhed, attempting to reunite, but all endeavors were obliterated by the profound darkness left in the wake of the broadsword. The flesh and blood failed to reestablish a connection.
Come on, come on... Mad Lady's relatively intact head sought to aid her body, but she swiftly perceived the annihilation of her soul. Her vision darkened, and her unevenly separated bodies crumpled to the ground.
Unperturbed by the fate of the April Fool's key member, Mr. K and Lumian redirected their focus to the grayish-white figure hurtling into the depths of the metal tunnel.
Comprising half fog and half flesh, the figure existed in a realm between reality and illusion.
The temporary Governor of the Sea, Lumian, once again honed in on the target and its surroundings, intending to marshal every ounce of sea power at his disposal.

At that moment, the grayish-white figure collapsed to the ground.
The flesh and blood originally belonging to Mad Lady seeped into the metal floor, and the grayish-white fog was on the verge of being absorbed.
Abruptly, the entire tunnel trembled. Lumian once again "saw" the pear-
shaped object fashioned from flesh and skin.
The flesh membrane on its surface buckled once more, outlining a disc-
shaped contour.
A formidable suction force erupted. Whether Lumian—the temporary Governor of the Sea—or Mr. K, they found themselves irresistibly propelled into the depths of the metal tunnel, as if an invisible hand seized them and drew them toward the core of the silver-gray behemoth.
Mad Lady's dismembered corpse and her belongings soared into the air, propelled towards the destination she had fervently yearned for in life.
The humanoid form outlined by the grayish-white fog seeped deeper into the metal floor, absorbing a portion.
In that moment, Lumian, wielding the temporary authority of the Governor of the Sea, employed his enhanced perception to "see" the flesh-and-blood "bird's nest" deep within the metal tunnel more distinctly than before.
The pear-shaped object's flesh and skin caved in, and the starlight and dark matter emanating from the surrounding flesh ropes accelerated their flow.
Through the taut skin and flesh, Lumian vaguely sensed the object nurtured within the pear-shaped structure.
It resembled a pitch-black vortex capable of devouring all colors and light. While not overly large, it featured a disc-shaped outer edge.
Wh... Lumian instinctively recalled scientific concepts and simplified scenes his sister Aurore had once explained. He identified a term that matched his observations: A black hole!
Did the Abraham family's ancestor seal a black hole with Amon? A black hole that has yet to fully form and is still nurtured within a mother's body from a mystical standpoint? Lumian found the idea absurd, straddling the line between scientific and mystical.
Simultaneously, he sensed a connection between the "black hole"-like object and another place. A profound, weighty, dense, and terrifying aura loomed over the world.
With a buzzing sensation, Lumian teetered on the brink of losing consciousness. Not only was his physical form being drawn

towards the flesh and blood "bird's nest," but even his thoughts, Spirit Body, and destiny converged in that direction.
It was the same for Mr. K.
One after another, Mad Lady's fragmented remains and a few belongings floated between them.
Beyond the silver-gray behemoth, Franca and the others felt an ominous suction emanating from the seabed. It seemed as though a colossal vortex was forming, ready to engulf everything in its vicinity.
Splash!
The mountainous azure waves and jade-green seawater collapsed, filling the seabed.
Abruptly, resplendent starlight descended from the sky.
Madam Magician materialized, adorned in a deep-black Warlock robe embroidered with shimmering silver stars.
The wielder of a Major Arcana card extended her right hand toward the silver-gray behemoth at the seabed. Her figure appeared in a state of overlap, intermittently clear and blurry.
Each radiant starlight transformed into an illusory door, seamlessly "melding" with the suction force, merging into the silver-gray behemoth.

Chapter 590: The Truth Behind the Seal

The surface of the massive silver-gray behemoth ignited with illusory doors, casting a star-like brilliance that darkened the sky above the sea.

This existing seal, triggered by Madam Magician, no longer resided in a nadir due to celestial shifts.

Starlight descended, swiftly repairing the temporary damage inflicted upon the seal.

Inside the behemoth, half of the grayish-white fog composing Mad Lady's human form was absorbed by the metal floor, appearing as if it would sink further.

In that crucial moment, starlight permeated the walls, floor, and ceiling, materializing resplendent doors of various shapes. These doors manipulated the void, thwarting the menacing suction and expelling the grayish-white fog.

Abruptly, Lumian felt the formidable suction force from the metal tunnel's depths dissipate.

He "saw" the dented flesh and blood "bird's nest" expanding again, releasing a copious amount of resplendent starlight.

The torrent surged through different parts of the silver-gray behemoth like a flood breaching a dam.

Lumian, Mr. K, Mad Lady's remains, and the items undulated with the sea's waves. As they were propelled forward, they encountered resistance and erosion from the sea's power.

Meanwhile, the fleshless, corporeal grayish-white phantom swayed in the vast starlight, growing fainter before gradually dissipating.

Unlike previous instances, the sea's power did not erupt from the ocean depths this time. Madam Magician had severed the energy passageway, successfully resealing and reinforcing the seal.

Madam Magician, her form seemingly illusory, raised her right hand and pointed at the betrothal ship and sailboat, her eyes mirroring the corresponding scene.

The two ships, along with Hela, Franca, the "Cinderella" demigod, the humanoid Sealed Artifact, the Maidens of the Sea, the remaining deputy hosts, and the sailors, vanished from the underwater cavity, instantly reappearing on the sunny, calm, turquoise sea beyond the seal.

Crash! Mountain-like azure waves and jade-green seawater resembling well walls slammed down, filling the underwater cavity.

Madam Magician's gaze then shifted to Lumian, Mr. K, Mad Lady's corpse, Pride Armor, and other items.

Just as she was about to relocate them, Lumian, still donning the Flog boxing gloves, suddenly felt a heavy, dense, terrifying, and brilliant aura "looking" at him from another place connected to the black hole in the flesh and blood "bird's nest."
Crack, crack. Lumian heard his bones shattering, his skull caving in, ribs snapping, and flesh compressing layer by layer.
After unleashing the Ascetic's accumulated strength, he, now taller, was instantly compressed into a short, thin, and dense form.
Intense pain flooded his mind, and his brain began to passively contract.
After a moment, Lumian broke free from the gaze and floated into the gradually calming air.
Before Madam Magician, an illusory book rapidly flipped, emitting a faint glow full of vitality. It bathed Lumian's body in light, reconstructing his broken bones and swiftly enlarging his compressed flesh, rescuing him from his near-death state.
Then, Madam Magician tossed Mad Lady's rose-gold ring embedded with the crimson gem to Lumian, allowing him to reassemble his flesh and blood and return to his original appearance. He was no longer a short, thin, and heavy peculiar human.
Simultaneously, in Port Santa, Loki's figure faded as he entered the spirit world, preparing to teleport away.
However, a dark, formless barrier appeared in front of him, blocking his path.
Loki's pupils dilated as he realized that at some point, he had been ensnared in a dark and transparent "sphere," seemingly bent from the void, with "walls" everywhere, and a hidden door.
High up in the spirit world—near the seven pure lights—Madam Magician hovered, adorned in a deep-black Warlock robe adorned with stars.
Loki's presence registered in her eyes, and an illusory book rapidly flipped before her.
She had strategically waited until the last moment to prevent Loki from receiving the Celestial Worthy's warning, providing her an opportunity to capture him alive.
Loki's lips curled into an exaggerated smile upon understanding the situation.
Rumble!
His body erupted from the inside out, as if a self-controlled bomb had been embedded in his flesh beforehand.
Loki's bizarre suicide succeeded; flesh and blood splattered, and his aura dissipated.

Madam Magician promptly lifted the seal on the area, capturing the information Loki had imprinted in the spirit world.
The spirit world served as a repository for all information. Divination often entailed revelations from the spirit world, and the matter of resurrection inevitably left corresponding information.
As long as she found relevant information in time, Madam Magician could trace Loki to his resurrection spot and pinpoint the ancient castle documented in the Secret Order records.
Soon, Madam Magician obtained something.
Her figure vanished from the spirit world's heights, navigating the endless darkness adorned with symbols.
In the next moment, a vast grayish-white fog materialized before her eyes.
Magician halted, gazing at the seemingly endless expanse of grayish-white fog.
...
Under the silent, dusky sky, above the calm blue sea.
Using Mad Lady's ring embedded with a crimson gem, Lumian adjusted his internal organs, flesh, and bones to their original state.
Treading on the corporeal wind, Lumian removed the ring that enabled the use of flesh and blood magic and anxiously inquired of Madam Magician, "How's the situation on the other two fronts?"
As he spoke, he sensed a mystical and indiscernible flicker from Madam Magician.
Magician smiled.
"Loki has just been killed by me, but I couldn't prevent his resurrection or seize the opportunity to locate his ancient castle.
"Bard has been captured by Gandalf, whom you intentionally sent to Milo Village. He's alive."
Phew... Lumian instinctively heaved a sigh of relief.
Though he hadn't captured Loki, wasting one more of Loki's resurrections meant he had achieved his objectives.
Furthermore, Ultraman and Mad Lady had been completely eliminated, and Bard had been captured alive. The results were satisfactory.
Initially, Lumian hadn't confirmed Bard's identity. He didn't even know if Bard had participated in the sea prayer ritual. However, he had a few suspects, including the fake Governor of the Sea and Juan Oro's grandson, Fernandez. Since most of the suspects were in Milo Village, he had Gandalf closely monitor them.
Madam Magician continued, "I relocated everyone else from these waters. I sent Mr. K of the Aurora Order back to his rented room in Port Santa. Mad Lady's corpse and items are floating here."

The Major Arcana card holder opened her palm, shrouded in darkness, forming a small box. Inside, Mad Lady's dismembered corpse and other items had "shrunk" to the size of mosquitoes, drifting as if in another world.
Lumian was taken aback. He looked at the bottom of the azure sea and asked, "Is it over?"
He had anticipated gaining control over the silver-gray behemoth eventually.
"Otherwise? Back then, even two Kings of Angels couldn't clean up the mess. How is our Tarot Club going to handle it—unless Mr. Fool awakens," Madam Magician replied in an amused tone.
Lumian recollected the items in the flesh and blood "bird's nest" and nodded in agreement.
He asked in confusion, "Is it true that sealed at the bottom is a black hole? Uh... Do you know what a black hole is?"
"I do," Madam Magician chuckled. "And I also know that the silver-gray thing down there is a spaceship."
Spaceship... Lumian was taken aback.
Upon reflection, he realized that the silver-gray behemoth bore a striking resemblance to the spaceship described in his sister's bedtime stories!
Madam Magician not only knew about spaceships but also grasped the concept of a black hole!
Never underestimate high-ranking individuals. The time-transcending knowledge possessed by transmigrators might not be foreign to them... Lumian sighed with emotion.
At that moment, he noticed that Madam Magician's mystical flickering had vanished.
The Major Arcana card holder gazed at the seabed and explained, "It's a black hole, ready to form, personally created by an evil god. Constantly absorbing surrounding matter and energy, it strengthens itself, eventually becoming a true black hole.
"In the Fourth Epoch, the evil god seized an opportunity to send the embryonic black hole through the spaceship at the bottom of the sea. The plan was for it to rapidly develop, tear apart, and devour our planet, causing the barrier to lose support and disintegrate prematurely. True gods and angels could escape, but without the barrier's protection, who knows what would happen.
"Fortunately, Mr. Door and Amon discovered the threat in time and took action. Yet, They couldn't obliterate the already developing black hole. Any attempts to destroy or destabilize it would only make it stronger. The only viable solution was to seal it and patiently wait for it to weaken through repeated radiations until it ultimately evaporates.

"Alternatively, they could transport it and the spaceship into the cosmos, abandoning it in desolate areas. However, this would require Mr. Door to leave the safety of the barrier and shadow the threat continuously to prevent accidents. Moreover, it remained under the vigilant gaze of that entity, which periodically replenished its energy through their connection. The danger was evident."

That explains it... Lumian finally grasped why it had been sealed rather than destroyed.

Intrigued, he echoed a term, "Mr. Door?"

It bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Fool.

Chapter 591: Information Gap

Upon hearing Lumian's inquiry, Madam Magician's tone carried a subtle emotion.

"Mr. Door is the ancestor of the Abraham family, the top duke among the five great nobles of the Tudor Empire. It was He who sealed this spaceship. Amon, on the other hand, designed the ritual that regularly siphoned power from the black hole to alleviate the pressure caused by the natural decay of the seal and hasten the black hole's demise."

Higher in rank than Amon... In the Tudor Empire, Mr. Door was second only to the Blood Emperor? He listened intently.

Madam Magician sighed softly at that moment.

"In a way, Mr. Door can be considered my mentor."

A mentor? Your mentor is a Fourth Epoch King of Angels and the top noble in the Tudor Empire? A figure from almost two thousand years ago... Lumian hadn't anticipated Madam Magician having such a profound background.

No wonder she earned the position of the Angel of Stars beside Mr. Fool's throne. No wonder she held a Major Arcana card in the Tarot Club!

Madam Magician glanced at Lumian, teasingly adding, "It's true that Mr. Door guided and 'supervised' me in advancing along the divine path, but the method wasn't as virtuous as you might imagine. It was far from good."

Far from good... Lumian was surprised before connecting the dots. Combining his experiences, he made a guess.

Madam Magician had once fallen under the corruptive influence of Mr. Door but received assistance from Mr. Fool. Did she join the Tarot Club because of this?

However, from Madam Magician's words, it seems she reconciled with Mr. Door? Otherwise, she wouldn't refer to Him as her mentor. How intriguing and surreal. Just like how I might say in the future that the Angel of Inevitability, Termiboros, was my mentor, Lumian mused inwardly and probed, "Is Mr. Door still active?"

Is He as lively as His peer, Amon?

Madam Magician shook her head.

"He has perished."

I see... Lumian cast his gaze toward the deep, bottomless sea.

"April Fool's objective is to acquire that spaceship? But it seems they are unaware of the nascent black hole sealed inside..."

It was a formidable entity that not even a true god could completely neutralize. Once released from its seal and allowed to

develop, it would compress and absorb everything in its vicinity. Why did the key members of April Fool's, who weren't even at the demigod level, believe they could confront it without fear?
Relying on the spaceship to contain it? That seemed improbable. Only the evil god who created the black hole or an entity at Mr. Fool's level could control it...
Mad Lady even believed that within the seal was an incubating deity or monster of a comparable magnitude...
With these thoughts in mind, Lumian's heart stirred as he inquired in a deep voice, "Were the key members of April Fool's misled? Is the Celestial Worthy's objective to unleash the black hole and trigger an apocalyptic catastrophe ahead of schedule?
"As long as Beyonders corrupted by Him enter the spaceship, He stands a chance of achieving His goal?"
He really doesn't seem to value the lives of Ultraman, Mad Lady, Bard, and Loki...
However, that is also typical of April Fool's modus operandi. They don't take lives other than their own seriously!
Lumian suddenly felt like laughing. His satisfaction from finishing off Ultraman and Mad Lady intensified.
Madam Magician nodded thoughtfully and remarked, "If you hadn't used all your resources and handled this matter with absolute strength, or if I had arrived ten to twenty seconds later and the grayish-white fog from Mad Lady's body had fully permeated the spaceship, the outcome might have been entirely different. We wouldn't be able to be here and discuss this matter so calmly."
Lumian reflected on the events that had transpired and muttered thoughtfully to himself, "If I hadn't gained temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea and restricted Mad Lady's teleportation, she might have approached the flesh-and-blood 'bird's nest' incubating the black hole before your arrival. She wouldn't have manifested a humanoid form made of grayish-white fog to infiltrate the spacecraft. If that had occurred, the situation might have been even more challenging to handle..."
The reason he obtained temporary authority as the Governor of the Sea was because he utilized Lie to pilfer a portion of the sea's power. This allowed him to resonate with the sea and possess a counterfeit yet highly elevated status.
The ability to use Lie to steal a portion of the sea's power was granted by the Seer pathway's mystical item, which had been imbued with a high-level power of Steal when placed on the ancestor-honoring altar in Milo Village.
The altar could bestow high-level Steal powers on items because it

was constructed by Amon... Constructed by Amon...
Lumian's thoughts suddenly cleared up. He grasped that it wasn't just him and the others sabotaging April Fool's; there were also influential figures in the shadows who didn't want the Celestial Worthy to succeed!
Madam Magician chuckled.
"Have you figured it out? I recognized what was happening when I saw Lie, now endowed with the power of Steal.
"Some time ago, I spied on the altar beneath Milo Village and confirmed its purpose—to gather the spirituality of worshippers and accumulate enough power to trigger the bestowment of the Steal ability. Given Milo Village's population and the number of individuals with the sea bloodline, it can only be bestowed once a year. It can't last more than half a month each time, and it can only be used once or twice.
"Lie's enhanced power far surpasses that."
Lumian furrowed his brow and asked, "Are you suggesting that the 'Steal' on Lie was directly granted by Amon?"
This hypothesis struck him as absurd, comical, and surreal.
In the past few months, Amon had been a source of terror, causing him mental distress. He nearly perished in the Samaritan Women's Spring. Subsequently, he informed the Tarot Club and aided the Angel of Time in eliminating most of the Amons in Trier. He also wrested a substantial debt from Amon's parasitic form.
Their relationship? It was one of deep-seated enmity! The sentiment was likely mutual.
Yet now, he was being told that Amon had covertly assisted him?
While Lumian understood that Amon's aid wasn't driven by benevolence but rather to thwart the Celestial Worthy's objectives, he couldn't shake the feeling that the world had taken a bizarre turn.
Madam Magician chuckled and explained, "Perhaps, back then, there was an Amon residing within the altar.
"Truth be told, I didn't anticipate that those who once instilled awe, fear, and vigilance in our discussions would occasionally collaborate with us. Of course, don't become complacent. While we may be teammates when facing the evil gods beyond the barrier, that doesn't extend to all matters. Even when dealing with the evil god's followers, it depends on the specific circumstances. They might believe they can handle it alone and use the opportunity to set a trap that could harm you."
"Alright..." Lumian resisted belief, but he had no choice but to acknowledge the reality before him. The truth was laid bare.
Having been briefed, Lumian mentally reconstructed the sea

prayer ritual, refining the spiderweb-like thought pattern without any critical deficiencies.
The corresponding experiences and lessons surfaced in Lumian's mind:
April Fool's biggest failure was not knowing that Franca and I are also members of the Tarot Club, apart from being part of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Moreover, the Tarot Club places great importance on matters related to the Celestial Worthy...
There's also an information gap between them and the Celestial Worthy, leading to their downfall...
Have they not considered that their goals might not align with the Celestial Worthy's?
Despite me lacking information as well, I wasn't careless. I didn't underestimate any visible or hidden enemies. Even a lion uses its full strength to hunt a rabbit...
Of course, the crucial aspect is that those holding key information and concealing it are on my side in this operation. *What if they become my enemies next time?* How should I deal with them...
As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian sensed that his digestion of the Conspirer potion had significantly advanced, thanks to the successful hunt and the questions he had formulated. Seizing this opportunity, he summarized his third acting principle: "One of the keys to a conspiracy is information. A good Conspirer must be adept at exploiting information gaps and even take the initiative to create information gaps."
Closing his eyes to assess his body's condition, Lumian felt that another major, successful conspiracy and a period of daily accumulation should allow him to completely digest the Conspirer potion.
And that major conspiracy could be combined with the ritual to advance to Sequence 5 Reaper. No further planning was needed.
The Reaper ritual required a conspiracy to capture a target whose Sequence was higher than his—alive.
When Lumian opened his eyes, Madam Magician transmitted the darkness in her palm to him.
"You'll be in charge of distributing these items. This is something a Hunter needs to learn and do well to advance to a demigod."
"Alright." Lumian was accustomed to distributing spoils of war.
He then added, "But before that, I'd like to meet Bard."
That, too, was a spoil of war.
...
In the ancient and dilapidated palace in the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian, Franca, Hela, and Gandalf materialized one after another.

They were adorned in their usual attire for Gatherings, with Lumian now assuming the guise of Muggle Aurore.
Gandalf unceremoniously tossed Bard to the ground, not bothering to restrain him.
Bard surveyed the familiar surroundings, devoid of any notions of escape or resistance.
This was the concealed Nation of the Evernight, isolated from the outside world. *How could he possibly flee?*
And against two demigods, how could he even attempt resistance?
Bard swallowed hard and spoke preemptively, "I was also bewitched by Loki!"
All he could hope for now was that, leveraging his Sequence experience as a Swindler, he could successfully "convince" the two demigods.
Noticing the silence from Hela and Gandalf, Bard added, "I can lead you to Loki's ancient castle. I know a clue, really!"
At that moment, Lumian Lee, masquerading as Muggle, spoke in a deep voice, "Just kill him and channel his spirit."

Chapter 592: Bluff

Kill him and channel his spirit?

Bard stared at Lumian Lee, masquerading as a Muggle, a chill running down his spine as his hair stood on end.

He sensed the unmistakable killing intent emanating from Lumian, causing fear to grip him.

However, a suspicion lingered in Bard's mind; he believed Lumian was trying to manipulate him, deliberately showcasing his anger and hatred to break his psychological defenses.

His suspicion arose because spirit channeling wasn't the optimal solution.

Celestial Worthy possessed a higher level than many evil gods, and the corruption of those evil gods could lead to a failed spirit channeling, what's more someone with the Celestial Worthy's bestowment.

Recognizing this, Bard's heart settled.

As a Swindler, he maintained a terrified expression, stepping back two paces as he looked at Lumian.

"I'll spill it all, no lies. You can verify it! Don't kill me!"

Lumian approached him step by step, brandishing a dagger.

Bard turned to Hela, Gandalf, and Franca, pleading in a "panicked" tone,

"He's lost his mind, and you're just going to let him be? Spirit channeling isn't all-powerful!"

Bard deliberately used "him" as a pronoun, signaling that he knew Lumian wasn't Muggle, as if urging them not to play along.

In two steps, Lumian arrived in front of Bard, casting his gaze at the April Fool's key member, who couldn't temporarily change his appearance back. He raised the dagger in his hand.

Bard sneered inwardly, growing more convinced that Lumian Lee wouldn't actually end his life for spirit channeling—at least not yet.

If his current actions weren't an act, Gandalf and Hela would have intervened no matter what. They wouldn't just stand by!

Bard strained his throat and shouted, as if terrorized, "I'll genuinely cooperate with you! I'll assist you in locating Loki and his ancient castle! See, I didn't even use my powers to resist in such a situation!"

As Bard shouted, he fixed his gaze on Lumian and the dagger's tip, attempting to convey evasion and pleading through his eyes. The former conveyed fear, and the latter was a plea for mercy.

Throughout this process, Bard's heart was filled with mockery, almost void of panic.

Trying to deceive a Swindler?
What a ludicrous notion!
I bet you'll stop after I count to five!
Five, four, three...
Pfft!
Bard's vision suddenly turned blood-red as the dagger thrust into his left eye, piercing through the gap in the eye socket and into his brain.
Impossible!
Absolutely impossible!
Is he truly going to kill me?
Intense pain overwhelmed Bard's mind, prompting him to instinctively raise his right hand and press it against his face. He fought in the opposite direction, striving to put some distance between himself and the dagger, the source of the agonizing damage.
Lumian reached out with his left hand, pinning Bard in place and making his struggles futile.
Then, Lumian leaned forward slightly and whispered into the ear of the April Fool's key member.
Bard glimpsed Muggle's beautiful face, her rosy lips moving as she whispered
—a whisper filled with satisfaction and mockery, "My godson has gnawed on half of Loki's arm and knows a lot about him. I believe that knowledge surpasses yours..."
Surpasses mine... If I had known earlier, I would have utilized my powers... Even in the midst of pain and struggle, Bard was momentarily stunned, feeling frustration, despair, and embarrassment.
Soon, these emotions dissipated. Lumian gripped the dagger embedded in Bard's eye socket and twisted it a few times, crushing the frontal lobe.
Observing Bard, who had now calmed down, Lumian nodded in satisfaction. He withdrew his dagger and earnestly assisted the other party in stemming the bleeding and bandaging the wound, though he skipped the disinfectant.
Only then did Franca approach and click her tongue.
"I thought you were just scaring him."
That's why she didn't intervene. She had watched as Lumian advanced toward Bard, dagger in hand, witnessing Bard's pleas for mercy.
She believed Hela and Gandalf had similar expectations.
When the dagger pierced Bard's eye socket, Franca was taken aback. It was only then that she realized Lumian was serious!

No, Lumian didn't truly intend to kill Bard. Instead, he planned to employ the April Fool's created prank to deal with him, recreating the original state of I Know Someone.
Without waiting for Lumian's response, Franca asked curiously, "When did you master lobotomy?"
Lumian wiped the blood off the dagger with a white strap and smirked mockingly.
"I learned it from watching the doctor perform surgery on I Know Someone.
"It's such a simple procedure. As a Beyonder skilled in action, if I can't memorize and imitate it after watching it once, it only proves that my brain has been corrupted by the potion."
Impersonating Muggle, Lumian deliberately spoke in his sister's voice, as if she were still alive.
Franca looked at Aurore's face under the hood and listened to her voice. She wasn't angered by the mockery. She only muttered, "The surgery isn't just about inserting and stirring a few times. There are still many key points before and after the procedure. Even during the surgery, if you insert it just a bit deeper, the outcome will be entirely different."
"So be it. If he really dies, we'll commence the spirit channeling." Lumian casually poured the remaining truth serum into the mouth of the stunned Bard, who offered no resistance.
After completing this task, he added, "Madam Hela mentioned that this place can minimize the influence of evil gods."
"It's only minimal, not zero. Besides, what if the problem lies in his spirit, and he self-destructs?" Franca instinctively retorted. This was why Hela hadn't directly pulled Bard into a dream to extract his true answers. After all, the dream might present scenes that shouldn't be seen. This was even more dangerous than simple verbal descriptions.
Only then did Gandalf, draped in a linen robe and a hood, sigh softly.
He couldn't bear to witness Bard's suffering, but he didn't discourage the actions taken. He wasn't the one who had been harmed by April Fool's. He wasn't in a position to criticize the victim's family for their extreme actions.
Before this operation, Hela had briefed Gandalf on Muggle's demise and Lumian Lee's role. The president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society sympathized with the siblings' plight, but he also blamed himself. He believed that the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had been unrestrained. As president, he bore a heavy responsibility.
After a moment, Bard, who had undergone a "requiem" and

gradually recovered from his pain, started addressing the queries of the people present.
The first to inquire was Gandalf. He peered down at the Dream Stealer and asked, "How did you come to believe in that Celestial Worthy?"
Gandalf and Hela had already gathered intel on Celestial Worthy from Franca and Lumian, and they deemed it crucial.
Bard responded calmly, "From the beginning. I used to be a cultural relic thief and acquired a batch of ancient items. While studying their history to ascertain their value, I deciphered the meaning of some inscriptions..."
Abruptly, Hela cut Bard's narration short and said coldly,
"You don't have to explain the full meaning. Just mention a few keywords."
Bard had no intention of arguing. He remained as docile as a sheep.
"Keywords include: Deception, Fooling, Door of All Doors, Lord of Mysteries...
As Bard finished speaking, the ancient palace they were in suddenly became misty and unclear.
Simultaneously, Lumian's left chest burned again.
In the next moment, the night sky outside the palace darkened even more, and all the mist vanished.
"Why did I feel like worms were growing in me just now?" Franca felt a lingering fear.
Merely a few names, incomplete honorific names, made her inexplicably uneasy. Every inch of her flesh seemed to come alive, about to transform into worms crawling out of her skin.
One of Bard's initial plans was to answer Lumian and company's questions dishonestly and without reservation. Then, he would take the initiative to reveal all the details regarding Celestial Worthy. He wanted to see if he could secretly corrupt his enemies and shake the Nation of the Evernight's concealments to create a "door" to escape.
"If I could really use this to corrupt Gandalf and Hela, why would they kill me when we're all Celestial Worthy believers? We would definitely work together to deal with Lumian Lee!"
Of course, Bard no longer harbored such thoughts. He had obtained an inevitable peace.
"Descriptions of high-level existences often indicate danger. In this world, ignorance might not be a bad thing." Gandalf sighed and assessed what had just happened.
He then inquired about the follow-up.
Bard's expression remained unchanged as he said, "After

deciphering the words, I lost consciousness. When I woke up, I had already transmigrated to this world.
"After adapting to my new body, I instinctively recalled my previous encounters and the words I had deciphered. Then, I saw a thin gray fog emanating from my surroundings and received a revelation from the Celestial Worthy.
"In other words, you believed in that Celestial Worthy as soon as you transmigrated, before the establishment of the Research Society?" Gandalf probed further.
"Yes." Bard's emotions lacked any fluctuations. "Back then, I thought that if I didn't choose to submit, believe in Him, or follow Him, I might die on the spot. When that happened, I might not have a chance to transmigrate and revive. Later, I gradually realized His greatness. He could even fool the Nation of the Evernight and prevent our problems from being discovered."
Gandalf pondered for a moment and asked, "How did Loki come to believe in that Celestial Worthy?"

Chapter 593: Fooled

In response to Gandalf's question, Bard recounted the past with a directness that left little room for ambiguity.

"I don't know. He didn't tell me. After the founding of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, I began to notice the guy's actions and demeanor mirroring the influence of the Celestial Worthy. Likewise, he saw the same in me, prompting a mutual inquiry. Eventually, we confirmed each other's intentions, and assembled an April Fool's team."

Gandalf and Hela probed about the Celestial Worthy, but with no breakthroughs, Lumian, disguised as a Muggle, shifted his gaze to Bard and asked, "What was your crew's aim in disrupting the sea prayer ritual?"

"To control the underwater spaceship. It's our ticket to traversing the cosmos and holding our ground against Angels to some extent..." Bard revealed April Fool's plan.

Lumian's lips curved upward.

"Do you know what's sealed in the depths of that spaceship?"

At this revelation, Franca suddenly grasped the core issue.

Spaceship?

The thing at the bottom of Port Santa is a spaceship?

Isn't this too sci-fi and not mystical enough?

Does this world have everything?

To expedite the interrogation of Bard, a key member of April Fool's, Lumian and Franca had entered the Nation of the Evernight without much communication.

"Spaceship..." Gandalf echoed the term, his tone brimming with unmistakable yearning.

Hela maintained a silence akin to the depths of night.

Bard responded to Lumian's inquiry, "According to our interpretation of the language and the insights from the Celestial Worthy, that spacecraft functions as both a petri dish and an incubation chamber. It's nurturing a high-level creature. Control the spaceship, and you control it. Without that control, the spacecraft alone won't stand a chance against an Angel."

The smile of "Aurore" became even more alluring.

"Ever wondered why the ancient Angel who sealed the spaceship didn't take control of it? Why didn't They command the high-level creature or destroy it outright?"

Bard fell silent momentarily before articulating, "It might take a considerable time for the high-level creature to mature. Taking control of the spaceship would halt everything. Patience is required until the recent few years—just before the creature is due

—before it can be managed."
Lumian's smile beneath the hood grew brighter.
"If that's the case, the ancient Angel who sealed the high-level creature will definitely reappear. Did you have the confidence to resist an Angel and win the spaceship? Or do you believe the Angel either didn't try to decipher or couldn't decipher the true meaning of those commands?"
"It's been so many years—They might have already perished..." Bard paused.
In his dream, a creature on the altar, potentially the avatar of an ancient Angel, hinted that the Angel might still be observing Milo Village and those waters.
"Why didn't we think to confirm it before embarking on the entire plan..." Bard voiced his doubts, his emotions showing no apparent shifts.
Lumian replied with a smile, "I can tell you that the spaceship isn't sealed with a high-level creature. It's an incomplete, nascent black hole. Once unsealed and piloted away, it will absorb the mystical body housing it, suck you guys in, and completely take shape, tearing apart and devouring the current world.
"Back then, the ancient Angels didn't attempt to control it because it was dangerous, idiot!"
Bard was once again taken aback, as if he had never considered such a possibility.
After a moment, he hesitated and said, "We... might have... been fooled..."
Though Bard's emotions remained unchanging, the blood-colored liquid that trickled from the simple bandage down the bridge of his nose painted a tragic and mournful picture.
Lumian burst into laughter, his back bending slightly.
"Do you only now realize that you've all been fooled by that Celestial Worthy? He provided revelations to mislead you. Through your deaths, He could open the seal and destroy this world to achieve His goals!
"Haha, April Fool's, indeed an organization of fools!"
Bard fell into silence once more, then candidly expressed his thoughts.
"We're fools, truly fools..."
Meanwhile, Gandalf and the others had varied reactions.
Dammit, a black hole? Destroy this world? Franca had thought the news of a spaceship was explosive enough, but she hadn't expected something even more terrifying to follow.
And an entity creating a black hole?
Franca, lacking direct understanding of top-level powers, realized

the magnitude of such a great existence.
Previously, she felt she had a sufficient understanding of the world. Now, she admitted frankly, I'm still a f*cking elementary school student!
Gandalf took a deep breath and said, "If I become a god, it would be so convenient for me to conduct research... Black holes..."
Hela retrieved a metal flask from her black widow clothes and took a sip, her thoughts inscrutable.
Lumian's laughter echoed for a moment, providing a brief respite. However, underlying pain still gripped his heart, resonating in the shadows within. It couldn't be eradicated or dismissed.
In the presence of the key members of April Fool's, memories of his sister Aurore's tragic fate couldn't be ignored.
Bard stood there, a silent reminder of a fact deliberately overlooked.
Hence, Lumian couldn't help but utter, "kill him and channel his spirit," resorting to action in a half-truth manner.
Looking at Bard, Lumian inquired, "Do you know if Ultraman and Mad Lady have been to Cordu?"
"Yes," replied Bard. "Part of our original plan was to find Nolfi's child, the sea maid. She lived in Intis's Riston Province. A stopover at Cordu was intended to confirm Muggle's situation and the final outcome of the prank."
At the mention of "prank," a vein on Lumian's forehead throbbed.
"How could you be so sure that Muggle was already dead?"
Hearing Lumian, disguised as a Muggle, pose this question, Gandalf let out another inaudible sigh. Franca sighed inwardly.
Bard shook his head.
"I'm unsure. Mad Lady and Ultraman went. They informed me the village was wiped out. No chance for anyone to make it out alive. They might have even employed divination, spirit channeling, and such to be sure."
"Impossible for anyone to survive?" Lumian smiled. "Am I not human?"
Bard glanced at him and spoke his mind.
"You might not even pass as human anymore."
That's not wrong. I'm now a humanoid Sealed Artifact with self-awareness and fate... Lumian made a self-deprecating remark before adding, "The number of survivors is greater than you can imagine. A certain madame, her husband, butler, and maidservant had fled."
Without giving Bard a chance to respond, Lumian inquired further, "What was Loki trying to achieve with the Muggle incident?"
"I wasn't deeply involved. Just tossed in a few ideas; not much in

the loop," Bard admitted honestly. "Ultraman might have a clue. He and Loki teamed up in other ventures."
"In what ventures?" Lumian persisted.
Bard shook his head slowly.
"Not entirely sure about the specifics. It's tied to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church."
Connected to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church? Ultraman, a Sequence 5 Priest of Light on the Sun pathway... The humanoid Sealed Artifact lost by the church on the betrothal ship... Lumian's instincts kicked in.
"Any key April Fool's members that are not transmigrators?"
They had previously misconstrued April Fool's as a gang of degenerated transmigrators. Yet, as an organization, it naturally expanded.
After all these years, April Fool's likely harbored more key members!
Bard nodded.
"Yes."
As expected... Lumian shot a glance at Franca, garbed in Assassin attire, seeking confirmation from Bard.
"One of them is a Purifier from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, and he holds a decent status?"
"Yes," Bard confirmed again. "Thanks to him, we got wind of a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact we could utilize when we altered our plan. He even assisted in its escape from the seal."
"And who might this person be?" Franca inquired, stepping in for the absent 007.
"It's a one-way line to Loki," Bard indicated, revealing his lack of knowledge about the member's true identity.
Franca chuckled, saying, "If the Eternal Blazing Sun Church launches an inquiry, they might stumble upon some leads."
Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts weren't just lying around. They couldn't be pilfered casually!
Lumian, noting Gandalf and Hela had no more queries, turned to Bard.
"What intel do you have on Loki's ancient castle?"
"It goes by the name Dylan—a charming name," Bard began. "Loki once told me it's a concealed ancient castle. Impossible to discover or see under normal circumstances. In simpler terms, you can't pinpoint its location through appearance or history.
"I've always envied Loki inheriting such a treasure after transmigration—an ancient castle. Later, he relied on the Celestial Worthy's revelation and the corresponding boon to succeed. I once tried to swindle Castle Dylan for myself, but I failed."

Chapter 594: Execution

Franca almost chuckled in exasperation at Bard's remark.

April Fool's not only deceived outsiders but also themselves. If they didn't believe in Celestial Worthy, cooperation wouldn't be on the table.

Bard delved into his knowledge about Castle Dylan.

"That ancient castle used to be the domain of a secret organization known as the Secret Order. Loki became a member of the organization when he transmigrated. The story goes that the initial leader of the Secret Order personally constructed the ancient castle and concealed it over a century ago."

Curious, Franca inquired, "Who's leading the Secret Order now?"

Bard shook his head slowly.

"Loki is in the dark about that too. Only those who've become Bizarro Sorcerers or Sequence 4 demigods within the Secret Order can meet the leader and establish a connection with him. Others merely follow the orders of their direct superiors.

"Loki once contemplated murdering his mentor, his immediate superior in the Secret Order, to gain the Bizarro Sorcerer Beyonder characteristic and stage a grand performance. Yet, due to his comprehension and fear of Bizarro Sorcerers, he never solidified this idea into a concrete plan. Eventually, he gathered all the Bizarro Sorcerer potion ingredients in Castle Dylan and entirely abandoned his initial scheme.

"Do you think a hidden place like Castle Dylan, with its long history, would be quiet, cold, and sinister? Contrary to expectations, Loki informed me that it's quite lively, featuring a grand performance every day."

A grand performance... Hela recalled the pitch-black ancient castle she had glimpsed in Loki's dream, along with the wax-statue-like guests inside.

Deep in thought, Lumian asked Bard, "How do you suggest we locate Castle Dylan?"

"I'm still missing crucial clues," Bard admitted sincerely. "If finding Castle Dylan were that straightforward, the current leader of the Secret Order would have seized it and ousted Loki. No, he would've turned Loki into his puppet."

Lumian intended to inquire more thoroughly with Ludwig later, seeking any information he might have gained after consuming half of Loki's arm.

"What about Hisoka? What insights do you have on Hisoka?" Lumian inquired.

Bard seemed to recollect something.

"That guy doesn't quite fit in. He prefers going solo. The rare instances of collaboration are mostly with Mad Lady.
"We all sense his emotions are pretty unpredictable, swinging between joy and anger. Mad Lady, however, remarked that he's not pure enough.
"He's highly dangerous—on par with Loki. His specific path remains a mystery. I've witnessed him using his abilities twice, both times involving mystical items. It's a poker card that can change its face, showcasing the attributes of Frost and Cut respectively. Word has it that Hisoka sought out an Artisan outside the Research Society to customize it after hunting a Beyonder."
Regrettably, Mad Lady is dead, and there's no means to commune with her spirit. She undoubtedly held more information about Hisoka... Does not being pure enough mean that Hisoka isn't as unhinged as he appears? *Is his occasional madness a deliberate facade?* Lumian pondered with a twinge of regret.
Even though Lumian had obtained Mad Lady's remains, her spirit had been severely corrupted by Celestial Worthy. Some of it had even been "washed away" by the power of the sea, completely obliterated.
Lumian sighed quietly and shifted the conversation to a different topic.
"Do you have insights into the sea's power on Ultraman?"
"Indeed." Bard shared his findings candidly. "I played a role in deciphering the extraterrestrial language, although the Celestial Worthy provided crucial revelations. Additionally, the power of the sea is not exclusive to the offspring of Port Santa. I once encountered two heretics in Lenburg with similar abilities, and I managed to extract corresponding knowledge from them.
"This information greatly aided my decryption efforts, revealing that this pathway is not solely tied to the sea. In fact, only a small portion of it involves the sea.
"The power primarily emanates from the stars and the land beneath our feet. As you all are aware, our world is, after all, a planet.
"The corresponding Sequence 9 is known as Astronomy Aficionado. It focuses on acquiring knowledge of the cosmos, related information, an initial perception of reality, and enhancing one's physique.
"Sequence 8, named Star Worshiper, can decipher the Star Language or the Language of the Stars and receive insights into fate.
"Sequence 7, called Star Sacrificer, gains true powers through sacrificial rituals involving the stars. This encompasses Gravity

Abnormality, Weakening Ray, Electromagnetic Attraction, and Cosmic Void.
"Sequence 6 is Navigator. They possess a deeper understanding of space and dimensions, allowing them to locate hidden passageways in the void and navigate and adjust routes between the stars. Navigating ships at sea becomes a straightforward task for them.
"Sequence 5, Tidal Scholar, further masters gravity and can whip up massive waves capable of shattering ships and demolishing docks.
"As for Sequence 4, it's known as Heavybringer. Unfortunately, I'm not too certain about their specific abilities."
Lumian remained silent, taking a couple of steps back and signaling for Franca and the others to continue questioning.
His primary concern centered around Loki's connection to Hisoka; anything else seemed less crucial.
Franca studied Bard for a moment before inquiring, "Have you recruited other members into April Fool's?"
"Yes," Bard admitted without hesitation.
After detailing what he knew about the April Fool's members outside the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Franca asked with curiosity, "Why did you choose the nickname Bard? Considering your past identity and current class, wouldn't Kaitō or Kid be more fitting?"
Bard responded calmly, "My current body was a bard, a wandering artist who often dabbled in thievery and swindling. He met his end when discovered trying to cheat others out of their money, suffering a severe beating."
Cheat, swindle, and steal—Franca thought. You know everything; it suits you quite well.
Franca turned to Hela and Gandalf, stating, "I have no further questions."
"Neither do I," Gandalf acknowledged, recognizing that Bard's life was approaching its end.
Muggle's brother wouldn't let him off the hook!
"Neither do I," Hela added.
Lumian raised his right hand, generating a dark-green glow at his fingertips.
The light transformed into a strange ray, penetrating Bard's chest.
Weakening Ray!
Lumian still had access to a week's worth of sea power, approaching the level of Sequence 5.
Bard's face contorted, muscles and nerves reacting instinctively.
His chest, close to his neck, rapidly melted and peeled, exposing

the flesh beneath.
Seeing this, Gandalf sighed again.
Gandalf sighed, condensing a straight sword with Sunrise Gleam and driving it towards Bard.
The light blade impaled Bard's head, and he crumpled to the ground with a thud, held down by the sword.
Bard writhed like a skinned insect, convulsing as life left his body.
Lumian observed in silence, refraining from intervening as Gandalf freed Bard.
When Bard's breath ceased, and he lay motionless, Lumian turned to Gandalf and Hela.
"Thank you for your assistance."
"It's our duty. We're all accountable for the harm April Fool's caused to the other members of the Research Society," Gandalf responded gravely.
Lumian didn't contest. Instead, he disclosed, "Before the operation, I mentioned joining a secret organization before assuming my sister's identity. To seek revenge, I invited members of that secret organization to assist. I believe you all have seen or sensed their presence."
He strategically linked the appearance of the Tarot Club to himself, safeguarding Franca's identity as a Minor Arcana card holder.
"And which organization is that?" Gandalf inquired curiously.
As per Hela's account, the secret organization exhibited Angel-level power, and the demigod "Cinderella" who appeared at sea was equally formidable.
"The Tarot Club," Lumian revealed truthfully.
"You're one of the Minor Arcana card holders?" Gandalf deduced.
He had heard about the Tarot Club.
Lumian nodded without denying it.
Curiosity piqued, Franca asked, "Which card represents that 'Cinderella' demigod? And why does her magic have such a dreamy quality? Moreover, it resembles fairy tales from before our transmigration!"
She maintained her role while genuinely expressing curiosity.
Lumian recalled Madam Magician's guidance and grinned.
"Major Arcana card, The Hermit."
Pausing momentarily, he added, "I'm uncertain about why she can transform your fairy tales into magic. What I do know is that she's closely tied to Emperor Roselle's descendant."
"Descendant of Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette?" Franca and the others, having read numerous entries from Roselle's diary, immediately speculated.
"Perhaps, but it's not Bernadette herself," Lumian honestly

disclosed.
That was the extent of his knowledge.
"Is that so..." Franca, Gandalf, and Hela felt enlightened.
So, it was connected to Emperor Roselle's faction!
It made sense for the Emperor to create fairytale magic.
After a brief pause, Lumian suggested, "You should probably prevent the Research Society from disseminating those fairy tales."
"Understood," Gandalf agreed.
Lumian pondered for a moment before stating, "I've concluded my involvement with the Research Society and have joined another secret organization. It's no longer suitable for me to participate in the Research Society's gatherings. You may find an opportunity to reveal the truth to the other members."
Gandalf and Hela exchanged glances and proposed, "You can continue playing the role of Muggle and acquire resources and assistance from the Research Society. We owe it to your sister."

Chapter 595: Spoils of War

Lumian wasted no time with pleasantries and accepted Gandalf's invitation without hesitation.

Firstly, within the vast expanse of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were numerous pathways. Besides the relatively scarce Devils, he gained access to a wealth of knowledge and various items. While these might not surpass what he already possessed in strength, they held the potential to unexpectedly shine in specific situations.

Secondly, this decision provided him with a pretext to continue assuming the role of Aurore as a Muggle. It created the illusion that his sister still existed somewhere in the world.

After the quartet concluded their discussion about the events in the peculiar waters, Bard's lifeless body underwent a startling transformation. Ephemeral lights coalesced in the corpse's right hand, causing both flesh and bones to crumble simultaneously.

Eventually, the palm resembled that of a baby—small and pallid.

The pale hue swiftly shifted, adopting a darker shade reminiscent of the ancient palace's surroundings.

It was a Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic.

Lumian focused his attention and detected a faint grayish-white fog within the shrunken palm.

He approached Bard's corpse, crouching down to search for additional items.

With this task accomplished, Lumian retrieved the spoils obtained from Mad Lady and Loki from his Traveler's Bag, placing them on the decrepit stone slabs of the ancient palace.

These included: a transparent, almost ethereal crystal, a bracelet with three diamonds flanked by four different-colored gems, a rose-gold ring adorned with crimson, blood-like gems, a simple silver ring, a dark-gold mask capable of concealing the entire face, a featureless small doll bound with white cloth, an intricate but exquisite mechanical music box, and a grayish-white brooch with a metallic gleam resembling lightning.

Accompanied by a relatively thin blank painting album and the Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic, the total count reached ten items.

Lumian then looked up and addressed Hela and Gandalf, "You can choose—

one each."

"It's our duty," Gandalf asserted, signifying the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's commitment to rectify past errors.

Speaking in Aurore's tone, Lumian, shrouded in his hood,

remarked,
"Duty doesn't preclude the choice of spoils. Just because official Beyonders must protect citizens doesn't mean they can't receive rewards."
Gandalf pondered for a moment before turning to Hela. Seeing her lack of objection, he sighed and conceded, "Fine."
Lumian's lips formed a smile as he pointed to each item, providing a concise introduction.
"The illusory transparent stone is a Traveler Beyonder characteristic left behind by Mad Lady, but it's severely corrupted. The thin gray fog emanating from it serves as evidence of this.
"The Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic is similarly corrupted by that Celestial Worthy, but the severity is not extreme. It's slightly less severe than the remains of most heretics after their deaths.
"That bracelet comes from Loki, known as the Seven-Stone Bracelet. Each diamond corresponds to a teleportation, and each colored gem corresponds to a ten-second Blink. Once used, it's gone. The drawback is that you hear random sounds when you wear it—ranging from a man having an affair to sounds from an unknown creature.
"This golden ring, named Blood Gold, bears an engraved inner loop with a brief sentence—'Controlling flesh and blood means controlling everything.' Its function enables the wearer to control their flesh and blood like a Rose Bishop. Additionally, they can employ three flesh and blood magics—Flesh Bomb, Flesh Cloak, and Flesh Blood Fusion. The drawback is repeated use may lead to dependence. Ceasing to wear it results in the body collapsing into a pile of flesh and blood, unable to maintain human form. Continual wear may lead to madness and loss of control.
"That silver ring is a semi-finished Ring of the Sea Queen, possessing a high-
level Steal ability usable only once. The drawback is that an ancient Angel will take notice of you.
"The dark-gold mask, a possession of Loki, survived his self-destruction. Its exact function remains unknown. Sensing it, one might feel an intense desire to wear it, believing it would grant abnormal power. Let's call it the Demon Mask.
"This featureless white cloth doll, a creation of Mad Lady, corresponds to the Faceless of the Seer pathway. When affixed to your shoulder, adjusting its facial features and figure is akin to altering your own appearance. Simultaneously, it empowers the wearer to master the ability to create Paper Figurine Substitutes. However, only the first paper figurine proves effective. Beyond

these functions, it allows the wearer to employ flames for a dynamic leap and develop a certain premonition of danger. Be warned, though—
carrying it around brings weak bad luck. Moreover, one day, you may realize that its face mirrors yours, and you will cease to be yourself."
"This mechanical music box, discovered on Loki's corpse, is from an unknown pathway or Sequence. It's rumored that the music it plays has the potential to either kill or drive anyone who hears it into madness. However, a prerequisite exists—you must hear the music for at least ten seconds."
"I just found this blank painting album from Bard. Its precise effects and drawbacks remain unknown, but based on my experience, the depictions on its pages may come to life or exhibit special effects. Notably, only nine pages remain, showing signs of tearing."
"This brooch, belonging to Mad Lady, appears crafted in anticipation of the loss of the Governor of the Sea's authority and the sea's berserk state. It grants the wearer fish scales, mitigating damage and enabling underwater breathing and movement akin to a fish. Each strike carries the effect of Electric Shock, with a near 100% probability of triggering natural lightning strikes in thunderstorms. Aligned with Sequence 6 or 5 of the Sailor pathway, the negative consequence is a heightened likelihood of being struck by lightning on rainy days, coupled with increased irritability and anxiety after wearing it."
Lumian concluded the introduction of the spoils of war, his knowledge derived from Madam Magician.
It was evident that for the success of the sea prayer ritual, April Fool's had entrusted most of their mystical items to Mad Lady. Bard had only left behind an ordinary-looking blank painting album. On the other hand, Loki, the leader of April Fool's, had seemingly retained his items privately. Whether it was his nature or a deliberate choice to retrieve them for hunting Ludwig remained unknown.
Gandalf looked at Hela. "Take your pick first."
Hela approached Lumian, carefully inspecting the ten items
before singling out Mad Lady's Traveler Beyonder characteristic.
"It's severely corrupted. Whether you decide to keep it or have an Artisan craft items, it's quite dangerous. Leave it to me."
In other words, she suggested that she had a method to handle it and mitigate potential harm.
"Alright." Lumian didn't object.
He respected the wishes of each individual and allowed them to

choose whatever they wanted. Of course, the order of selection mattered too. His team would be last, and he would be last.
Hela extended her right hand, and the night outside the ancient palace seemed to stir.
The illusory crystal shrouded in grayish-white fog vanished.
After Hela returned to her spot, Gandalf made his selection.
Franca's heart skipped a beat as she observed the president scrutinizing the remaining nine items. She whispered,
Don't choose the Seven-Stone Bracelet, don't choose the Seven-Stone Bracelet...
That was the teleportation she had been longing for!
The Traveler Beyonder characteristic was too dangerous. She didn't dare to set her sights on it. Although the Seven-Stone Bracelet was an expendable item, its advantage lay in its many uses and its relatively manageable negative effects.
Gandalf's intense gaze fixed on the dark-gold mask, his mutterings barely audible,
"I've got a burning desire to delve into its powers and potential...
"But it's too risky. I'm itching to put it on now...
"Yes, the Blood Gold ring aids my experiments into dangerous matters. The blank painting album requires further exploration...
"The high-level Steal ability is also worth studying... But being noticed by an ancient Angel is no small matter..."
After thorough contemplation, Gandalf turned to Hela and spoke, "Can I leave the silver ring here? I want to arrive half an hour early to study it before every gathering."
"Alright," Hela agreed to Gandalf's request.
Thus, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society opted for the half-finished Ring of the Sea Queen.
Franca let out a sigh of relief and grinned at Gandalf.
"President, you really should've gone down the Reader pathway. You suit their style perfectly."
Why did he have to pick Warrior just to live up to the title of Gandalf?
Gandalf, the half-giant in a linen robe, glanced at Franca, smiling without uttering a word.
Lumian stowed the remaining items back into his Traveler's Bag, not affording Franca an opportunity to choose first.
...
At Port Santa, near Solow Motel, inside Loki's rented room.
Lumian received a response from Madam Magician:
"Even I can't decipher the intricate abilities of that dark-gold mask, indicating its exceptional nature. Inquire with Mr. K if he desires it. If not, leave it in my care for now. I'll seal it and await the

opportune moment. It might prove useful when the time comes.
"Ma'am Hermit has her eyes on the mechanical music box. Other items hold little significance for her, but this one, at least, is exquisite.
"Mr. Moon expresses interest in the faceless doll; as for the reason, I remain in the dark.
"I'll entrust you with distributing the rest."

Chapter 596: Lord's Revelation?

In Mr. K's temporary apartment in Port Santa,
Lumian unpacked the remaining spoils of war from his Traveler's Bag, placing them on the coffee table.
He shot a glance at Mr. K, who, now adorned in a black robe with a deep hood, spoke first, "These are the gains from the operation. Perhaps there's a revelation from the Lord among them."
Mr. K nodded subtly, diverting his attention to the items, his gaze fixating on the dark-gold mask.
In a deep, hoarse voice, he mused, "I sense something special about it. This should be a revelation from the Lord."
With a swift motion, Mr. K extended his right hand, pulling the strange dark-
gold mask into his grasp amidst a sudden gust of wind.
However, the Aurora Order Oracle didn't put the mask on; instead, he discreetly stowed it away in a hidden pocket within his black robe.
Witnessing this, Lumian was momentarily taken aback.
He had been contemplating how to subtly carry out Madam Magician's instructions, aiming to inquire if Mr. K desired the dark-gold mask. Surprisingly, he had spontaneously fabricated a Lord-given revelation as an excuse. Before Lumian could specify which item it was, Mr. K had chosen the dark-gold mask himself.
Could it genuinely be a revelation from the Lord? Hiss... Lumian took a deep breath.
Had Madam Magician sent me to ask Mr. K because she foresaw something or glimpsed something?
These high-ranking figures always prefer to communicate through hints and revelations. Couldn't they be more direct?
Amidst his thoughts, Lumian stowed away the remaining items and earnestly addressed Mr. K,
"I didn't expect the matter to escalate like this. I initially believed that with you and my sister's friends from her past, it would suffice to seek vengeance. Yet, it spiraled into something of a much higher magnitude. Thankfully, my sister's allies were vigilant and leveraged their connections."
The sincerity in the first half of Lumian's statement contrasted with the second half, which explained the influx of demigods, even Angel-level forces, this time. He subtly shifted the blame to Franca and Aurore's associates.
Lumian sensed a high likelihood that Mr. K might not fully buy into his explanation. Disregarding the possibility of the Aurora Order's Oracle Grazing a relatively high Sequence Spectator,

Lumian believed that the intentional arrangements and subtle traces left behind by the entity he believed in were sufficient evidence of constant watching, listening, and awareness. As for Sequence 8 of the Shepherd pathway, known as Listeners, they often received revelations from that figure.
Nevertheless, Lumian needed a plausible excuse. He couldn't just tell Mr. K outright, "Yes, I am a member of the Aurora Order, part of the Tarot Club, and also affiliated with the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. My Major Arcana card holder is an Angel, and I know countless demigods who can lend a hand. Besides worshiping your Lord, I also believe in Mr. Fool. Occasionally, I praise the Sun and say By Steam..."
Wasn't this equivalent to provoking him in his face?
Unspoken truths didn't always need to be voiced.
Mr. K subtly nodded.
"Good job. Dealing with matters involving evil gods demands all your strength."
Then, he added, "After learning that your adversary is tied to an ancient evil god, I've already reported it to the higher-ups. At that time, our Aurora Order's Angels were likely keeping an eye. If anything truly occurred, one or more would have definitely descended."
"..." Lumian's expression froze.
Did the Aurora Order's Angel also observe the spaceship back then?
Isn't this setup too exaggerated? April Fool's isn't even an organization with a single demigod!
Is Celestial Worthy such a taboo when it comes to Madam Magician and the Aurora Order?
It's understandable for the Tarot Club to give it significance, especially considering its connection to Mr. Fool's awakening. But why does the Aurora Order behave as if they're confronting a formidable adversary...
Lumian pushed aside the issue of inviting an Angel and four demigods for his revenge. He couldn't help but sigh at the Aurora Order's exaggerated reaction.
Mr. K fixed his gaze on his subordinate and delivered a passionate lecture, "Just because high-ranking individuals are keeping an eye on us doesn't mean we can be lax and handle things half-heartedly. These individuals have numerous crucial matters to attend to. They might only cast an occasional glance our way. If we don't put in enough effort and work diligently, it could easily lead to complete failure. And in that scenario, death won't be sufficient to atone for our sins."
"Yes, yes, you're right," Lumian echoed Mr. K without any intention

of arguing.
...
Upon returning to Loki's rented apartment, Lumian gathered the remaining five spoils of war and grinned at Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.
"It's finally our turn to choose."
Not wanting to tease the eager Franca any further, Lumian pointed to the dining table where the items were laid out.
"Take your pick first."
"Hehe." Franca smiled sheepishly, shamelessly picking up the Seven-Stone Bracelet. She exclaimed excitedly, "I can teleport too!"
"Aren't you afraid of overhearing something you shouldn't?" Lumian teased.
Franca had already considered this issue.
"It's not like I'll wear it forever. I'll only use it when I need it. And teleportation takes only a short time. If I really hear an unknown voice, the impact will be minimal. I should be fine if I remove it in time.
"Don't worry. The negative effects of Beyonder items similar to charms aren't strong. They can even be considered weak."
Lumian scoffed dismissively.
"Have you forgotten what you have on you?
"Primordial Demoness figurine! Mirror World Fragment!"
What if she heard the Primordial Demoness's ravings?
Franca cleared her throat and said, "I'm now a member of the Demoness Sect and a believer in the Primordial Demoness. What's wrong with listening to the voice of God? At most, it'll make me excited. When the time comes, heh heh..."
She glanced at Lumian and Jenna, keeping her thoughts to herself.
"I'll get your help!"
Franca immediately added, "Furthermore, my Primordial Demoness figurine and the Mirror World Fragment are stored in the Traveler's Bag. They won't be taken out unless absolutely necessary. It's as if they're sealed."
Lumian remained silent. He turned to Jenna and Anthony, asking, "Which one of you wants to go first?"
"Anthony. He played a more significant role than me this time," Jenna replied politely.
Anthony smiled.
"Are you disregarding me as an Intisian man? I still believe in 'lady's first.'"
Considering Jenna's usual Showy Diva demeanor, she might have typically responded with something like, "Those Intisian men who claim 'lady's first' only want to get them in bed. Are you having

such thoughts about me too?"
Jenna, despite her lack of overt actions, had a knack for teasing in a crude manner.
However, at this moment, after exchanging glances with Lumian and Franca, she turned to Anthony with sincerity.
"I'm in a dilemma. I want you to help me eliminate an option."
Anthony didn't decline and assessed the remaining four items.
"The Blood Gold ring enhances my survivability and strengthens my direct attacks. However, whether it's dependency or madness, it's something a Psychiatrist should avoid. Furthermore, I'm now a Hypnotist. I can use Psychological Invisibility and have the protection of Dragon Scales.
"Apart from underwater mobility, this brooch can only be used in close combat. Why would a Hypnotist like me engage in close combat?
"The Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristics and blank painting album aren't bad. If the former is crafted into a mystical item with weak negative effects, it should be very useful. However, that's not a certainty for the moment unless I find a very good Artisan..."
Anthony decided on the blank painting album.
"As an information broker, I'm adept at sketching. Such an item that can create different effects is very suitable for a Hypnotist to observe first before taking action."
Without needing Madam Magician's explanation, Franca had already used Magic Mirror Divination to confirm the function of the blank painting album: "The objects drawn on it might become alive and stay so for a short period of time. They might also have different effects. The painting paper will lose its mystical effects after being used once. The negative effect is never to respond to the knocks coming from the painting paper."
Lumian and Jenna agreed that it was very similar to the abilities of Pixies.
After Anthony stored the painting paper, Jenna seized the Dream Stealer Beyonder characteristic without hesitation.
"Why?" Lumian inquired with amusement.
Jenna looked at him and grinned happily.
"It's the most valuable! Among the remaining three items, only it corresponds to a Sequence 5. Even if it fails to become a mystical item, it can be sold for a large sum of money."
I still owe Franca 45,000 verl d'or. In the future, I might even purchase the Demoness of Pleasure potion formula from her.
"An excellent reason." Lumian casually glanced at the remaining two items and placed the grayish-white lightning-shaped brooch on his chest. "I want this. In the future, call it the Fury of the Sea."

He chose the brooch over Blood Gold because, as an Ascetic, he could bear impatience and other emotions. Pure madness was too dangerous for him, given the darkness in his heart.
Lumian tossed the Blood Gold ring to Franca.
"Put it in your Traveler's Bag. Anyone can use it whenever needed. It shouldn't be used often."
"You won't give it to Madam Magician?" Franca asked in puzzlement.
"Do you think she'll take a fancy to it?" Lumian stuffed the Fury of the Sea into his Traveler's Bag and chuckled. "Her spoils of war are naturally the humanoid Sealed Artifact, but she might return it to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church."
With that, Lumian turned to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, "Next, I'm going to do something unsuitable for others to see. Do you want to watch?"

Chapter 597: Too Dirty

Franca's curiosity was piqued by Lumian's words.

"Is there anything we can't see?"

"Are you sure you want to watch? I'm afraid it will deal a strong blow to your mind," Lumian asked in a teasing tone.

Amused, Franca pointed at herself and retorted, "Me? I'm not a minor. My mind is very mature. Why wouldn't I dare to look? Heh, I'm much more knowledgeable than you, boy!"

Jenna nodded in agreement, silently endorsing Franca's claim.

Without further persuasion, Lumian left the apartment and headed to the room he had rented with a fake ID to monitor himself.

Lugano was staying there with Ludwig.

Franca followed with Jenna and Anthony, muttering, "I thought it was something major. Isn't it just going to your godson? What impact on the mind..."

Lumian signaled for Lugano to retreat temporarily. Then, he retrieved two gruesome items from his Traveler's Bag, forming a humanoid figure with them.

Maintaining an unchanged expression, Lumian looked at Ludwig and pointed at the two parts of Mad Lady's corpse.

"Is it edible?"

Edible... Franca was taken aback.

Her gaze shifted between the repulsive corpse parts and Ludwig's boyish appearance. Suddenly, she felt a wave of nausea, as if her mind had been corrupted by the imagined scene.

Indeed, Lumian's godson gained knowledge or abilities by consuming specific creatures, including humans. Memory, after all, was a form of knowledge!

Franca couldn't suppress her urge to retch, regretting her decision to witness the cannibalistic act.

To make matters worse, she knew the person who had been consumed—Mad Lady. She had interacted with her before.

Jenna's face contorted, clearly struggling to contain her churning stomach acid. Anthony, a seasoned veteran accustomed to witnessing scenes of gore, subconsciously frowned.

Ludwig scrutinized the two bloody corpse parts in Lumian's hands for a moment before slowly shaking his head.

"It's too dirty."

Dirty? Could it be a reference to the severe corruption of the Celestial Worthy? Even you won't dare to swallow it for fear of something happening? Lumian threw Mad Lady's two corpse parts to the ground with regret, summoning a crimson fireball that was

nearly white.
Rather than exploding, the fireball adhered to Mad Lady's corpse, burning and compressing it into charred dust.
Amidst the dancing flames and the burning fragrance, Franca and Jenna breathed a sigh of relief.
Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, addressing Ludwig, who was nonchalantly nibbling on a cupcake, "Wasn't that person's arm dirty?"
He was referring to Loki.
"Just a little. The dirtiest part isn't on the arm," Ludwig commented casually, as if discussing which fish were poisonous and how they should be consumed.
Only then did Lumian get to the point.
"What did you gain from that person's arm?"
"Some knowledge," Ludwig replied, nonchalantly nibbling on a sponge cake covered in light cream, as if he preferred not to be disturbed while eating.
Lumian, feigning indifference, asked bluntly, "What are they?"
Ludwig's voice alternated between clarity and muffled tones as he replied, "Sequence Knowledge about his pathway... There are two other terms... One is Dylan... and the other is Orville..."
Dylan? *Is that the name of Loki's ancient castle?* And what's Orville?
Lumian's curiosity peaked, prompting him to interrupt Ludwig.
"Apart from the name itself, is there any relevant knowledge?"
Ludwig seized the opportunity to take another bite of cake. After chewing and swallowing, he said, "No, but... these two terms seem to be connected. Orville should be the name of a place, and Dylan is the castle's name."
Connected... Name of a place... Castle Dylan is in Orville? *Where is Orville?* Lumian turned to Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, realizing they were clueless, shaking their heads in ignorance.
After a moment of contemplation, Lumian spoke in a deep voice,
"Our next priority is to find information about Orville and Dylan through our respective channels."
Getting nods of agreement from Franca and the others, Lumian asked Ludwig again, "Anything else?"
"His spirituality is quite abundant, and his quality isn't bad. He doesn't like hard liquor or drinking freely. He only drinks champagne and occasionally has coffee. He's a loyal advocate of tea leaves. He's healthy, has good bowel movement, and urinates normally. He hates the smell of the washroom..." Ludwig shared the information obtained from the half arm.
Franca listened with keen interest, and just as Lumian was about to interject, Ludwig divulged another piece of valuable

information:
"He owns Castle Dylan, but he doesn't reside there. He only returns occasionally. He's not the sole proprietor yet. Many areas there aren't accessible to him. Recently, he unlocked a room and acquired a dark-gold mask.
"That mask will grant him immense power, but once he wears it, he'll face terrifying matters."
Could that dark-gold mask be a relic from the original owner of Castle Dylan? Perhaps a memento from the previous leader of the Secret Order? Lumian nodded thoughtfully.
To him, this information wasn't particularly crucial as the dark-gold mask had already been handed over to Mr. K. Thus, he had no reason to be concerned about it.
Franca, Jenna, and Anthony prepared to return to Trier after the Q&A session with Ludwig, having confirmed that they had gleaned all they could.
Of course, Lumian took responsibility for their return journey. Franca couldn't bring herself to use one of the Seven-Stone Bracelets at the moment.
"By the way," Lumian looked at Franca, pondering for a moment. "Contact the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and see if they're willing to exchange information about the humanoid Sealed Artifact and its corresponding story. We'll make efforts to facilitate this transaction."
Upon Bard's mention that he was uncertain about his human status, Lumian realized his resemblance to the humanoid Sealed Artifact. However, Bard retained his rationality and clarity, possessing a relatively independent fate. Otherwise, he could be deemed a walking Grade 0 humanoid Sealed Artifact. This sparked Lumian's curiosity about the humanoid Sealed Artifact, wanting to uncover what had happened to her and why she had transformed in such a manner.
Franca nodded and instinctively said, "But, uh, that lady only mentioned the possibility of returning it, nothing definite."
"We're merely striving to facilitate the transaction. It's not guaranteed either." Lumian chuckled.
He quickly sent Franca, Jenna, and Anthony back to Trier Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative before entering Aquina Street. Strolling among the citizens still immersed in the afterglow of the celebration, he made his way towards Solow Motel.
Half of the motel's fifth floor had collapsed, and the fourth floor was severely damaged. Otta, the owner, observed the scene with sorrow and helplessness. He wanted to cry, but the tears wouldn't come.

At a certain point, Noelia of the Fertility Order approached Louis Berry, the adventurer overseeing Solow Motel. She spoke in a formal tone, "Your partner said you'd be responsible for the compensation."
Lumian retrieved 10,000 gold risot from his Traveler's Bag and handed it to Noelia.
Noelia glanced at his black coin bag and sighed with emotion.
"That's good stuff."
The combat nun then counted the compensation.
"10,000 risot? That's enough to build two motels like this!"
"How generous. Just as expected from an adventurer who recently bagged a bounty of 300,000 gold risot."
Lumian brushed off Noelia's teasing and continued, "This is the reward from the Paco family's commission."
"The Paco family..." Noelia fell silent.
The Paco family's matriarch, the current family head, and his wife —all perished in this conflict.
Lumian pressed on, weaving through the crowd as if on a leisurely stroll.
In the dusk's afterglow, he heard singing, seabirds chirping, and citizens animatedly discussing the past few days.
"Did you see that? In the morning, seabirds came to pay their respects to the Governor of the Sea!
"Is this year's sea prayer ritual that successful?
"That's right. Back then, many vines grew crazily. Many people fainted from joy. This is Earth Mother's recognition of the sea prayer ritual!
"No, that's not right. It represents a bumper harvest. It means this year's fish harvest will fill ship after ship!
"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!
"Praise the Governor of the Sea!
"..."
Though Lumian wasn't privy to the Church of Earth Mother's method to make citizens view the morning mysticism roundup as a miracle, he sensed joy and delight in everyone's hearts.
Leisurely, he thought, I wonder if the remaining committee members of the Fisheries Guild have finalized the choice for the fake Governor of the Sea. Sure, the real Simon Guiaro is the top contender. However, it doesn't matter who takes the role this year. The power leaked by the spaceship is now in my possession. In the next year or even two, there won't be frequent catastrophes in these waters. The sea creatures will reproduce faster thanks to the 'watering'...
Heh heh, from a certain perspective, I'm the true Governor of the

Sea—for just a week...
In the midst of the lively parade and numerous street vendors, Lumian casually located a bar and ordered an undiluted Manzan and a large cup of locally brewed dark-gold malt beer.
Placing the Manzan glass across from the small round table, he lifted his beer, clinking it. Then, he muttered with a smile, "Did you see that? Did you hear that? Their dance, their singing, and the sound of fish multiplying.
"Isn't this the future you desire?"
With that said, Lumian downed a mouthful of dark-gold beer.

Chapter 598: Confrontation and Reconciliation

The night draped the land in darkness, and stars adorned the sky above Port Santa. The festive crowd had dispersed, leaving behind the remnants of celebration—discarded litter and the lingering scent of alcohol.

With the official end of the holiday, the city would soon buzz with work again.

Lumian lingered at the bar until closing time. As he stepped out, the deserted streets welcomed him, illuminated only by sporadic gas lamps.

The late-night air hinted at the approaching winter's chill. Lumian breathed it in, feeling the crisp freshness entering his lungs. The rhythmic crash of waves against the shore added to the night's serenity.

In seemingly high spirits, Lumian, slightly tipsy, walked past the aftermath of the celebration with hands in his pockets, unnoticed in the silent surroundings.

He made his way back to the room rented under a false identity.

Upon opening the door, he found Lugano pacing anxiously in the living room.

"Still up?" Lumian raised an eyebrow.

Lugano, looking like he'd recovered from a serious injury, spoke with a complex expression,

"An hour ago, Captain Noelia of the combat nuns paid you a visit. Not in armor, but a stunning dress. She has quite the figure..."

"And then?" Lumian inquired, a smirk on his face.

Lugano replied with envy, "She left disappointed when I told her you weren't around."

Lumian chuckled, "What's it got to do with you? Why are you still awake after an hour?"

Lugano coughed awkwardly, "I had a sudden contemplation about my future. Should I return to Trier and pursue a medical career, or should I opt for a different path?"

Ignoring the Doctor's musings, Lumian, with a smile, washed up briefly and retired to his room, succumbing to sleep.

In his dreams, recent events blended into a chaotic tapestry, weaving stranger and more bizarre stories.

At precisely 6 a.m., Lumian awoke and promptly sat up.

His thoughts sharpened as he recalled the dream. Suddenly, a detail struck him:

Disregarding the possibility of the Aurora Order having covertly observed the situation, the crucial aspect of the sea prayer ritual was Amon's utilization of the altar in Milo Village to discreetly

imbue Lie with a "Steal" ability.
Without this intervention, the opening of the spaceship's energy passageway would have led to a reversal. Deprived of the sea's power, he couldn't have ensnared Mad Lady with the authority of the Governor of the Sea, delaying her until Madam Magician's arrival.
However, Celestial Worthy, positioned at the pinnacle of the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways, should possess an in-depth understanding of Marauder abilities. It seemed unlikely that He hadn't considered the possibility of an Amon hiding at the altar, granting "Steal" powers.
It made sense that He hadn't shared this knowledge with April Fool's; they were expendable tools, and excessive information might weaken their resolve during the operation. But the overall plan shouldn't have crumbled due to this.
Were Celestial Worthy's intentions more intricate than they seemed? Had He secretly achieved a goal, or did Amon and His unseen ally orchestrate events in advance?
Had Amon truly kept watch over the altar in Milo Village without pause, last year's sea prayer ritual might not have failed. There remains the prospect that He wanted to derive amusement from April Fool's antics.
The chaos wrought by April Fool's last year was perhaps understandable. Shouldn't the most straightforward approach this year involve discreetly allowing the completion of the Ring of the Sea Queen during the ancestor honoring ritual? Subsequently, events could unfold with Ultraman assuming the guise of the incoming Governor of the Sea, only to be dumbfounded when the sea sacrifice ritual succeeded!
Why the convoluted path? What was the purpose behind these seemingly unnecessary steps?
There must be something I'm missing...
Lumian massaged his temples and rose from the bed.
The revelation didn't surprise him. It would be abnormal if he quickly unraveled the true motives of every participant in such complex scenarios involving high-level entities.
Regardless, his goal was accomplished, and the perilous black hole in the spaceship remained sealed. The rest was not his concern. If he could decipher it, great. If not, he could always write to Madam Magician to provide a timely reminder.
After a jog around the still-slumbering Port Santa, Lumian penned a letter to Madam Magician, detailing his reflections.
As Lumian finished, Lugano, who had been out gathering breakfast for Ludwig, returned to his quarters.

Taking a moment to contemplate, Lumian handed over 1,000 gold risot to Lugano. With a composed tone, he stated, "I'll be away for a few days. Take care of Ludwig. When I return, this commission will be completely over."
When the time came, Lumian planned on taking a boat to the Southern Continent. Lumian intended to conspire and make preparations along the way. His aim was to be ready for the final conspiracy and advance to Sequence 5 upon reaching his destination in the Southern Continent.
Without prying into his employer's destination, Lugano nervously asked, "W-
will there be any danger in the next few days?"
"It's done," Lumian replied with a smile. "If any other danger arises, go to the Fertility Order and seek protection. Isn't that what you've been anticipating?"
Lugano grinned sheepishly, reassured by Lumian's demeanor.
Under the shining sun of Port Santa, with delicious food and passionate women, staying a few more days seemed like a pleasant prospect!
...
A two-story relay carriage raced through the village towns scattered across turquoise pastures, making its way towards the base of the Pyraez mountain range.
Maintaining his disguise as the adventurer Louis Berry, Lumian occupied a window seat in the carriage, silently observing the passing scenery.
Each turquoise pasture was adorned with flocks of sheep, resembling scattered clouds. Shepherds, clad in practical and mobile robes, strolled amidst the grazing animals.
Some had their own shacks, while others utilized small, wheeled shepherd's huts for mobility.
Occasionally, local villagers attempted to drive away the incoming shepherds, only to be met with sly smiles or placated with money and supplies.
Faced with determined locals, the shepherds, arriving from the mountain pass, reluctantly moved to more desolate areas, contending with the watchful eyes of wild wolves and other creatures...
The scenes spoken of by the Cordu shepherds presented themselves vividly to Lumian, searing a memory in his mind.
Two days later, the relay carriage halted at the foot of the Pyraez mountain range, pausing in a small town outside the mountain pass.
Lumian changed into a black tweed coat, preparing to venture into

the mountain alone.
As he ascended the mountain ridge, the cold wind intensified, rendering the wilderness almost devoid of life.
Navigating the sparsely vegetated mountainous terrain, Lumian followed the trails left by shepherds and merchants. Under the birdless gray sky, the desolate landscape featured withered trees and a meager stream. Winter's solitude permeated the air.
In the cold solitude, it took him nearly three days to traverse the Dariège mountain range and reach the river outside Cordu.
Circling the towering forest, Lumian promptly spotted the blood-colored pillar, emanating the aura of a mountain peak despite its modest height.
As Lumian gazed, footsteps approached from ahead.
A middle-aged man, clad in a leather coat and clasping his hands together, appeared.
Trembling in the cold wind, the forest ranger shouted, "Don't go any further. That village is gone!"
Lumian's eyes moved beyond the ranger to the collapsed and burned structures in the distance.
After a brief pause, he inquired in a deep voice, "What happened to that village?"
The forest ranger glanced around and lowered his voice, "They said they believed in demons. The villagers went crazy, burned down their houses, and walked into the abyss.
"Look, would a normal village be like this?"
Lumian fell silent for a long time.
Seeing this, the forest ranger sincerely said, "In any case, those old men instructed me to prevent anyone from entering this village. They said that it's bad luck; it would provoke the demons."
Lumian remained silent, refraining from further inquiry.
Staring at the unfamiliar yet oddly familiar ruins, he turned away from the village entrance. Step by step, he approached the nearest alpine pasture, the wind howling around him.
The grass here had completely withered, blown away by the wind, leaving behind barren patches of brown soil.
Lumian surveyed the ruins of Cordu, then located a shack abandoned by the shepherds. Inside, he lay down, closing his eyes and remaining motionless.
If only everything that had transpired before could be dismissed as a dream.
When he woke, the alpine pasture was vibrant green once more, birds returned to the sky, and Ol' Tavern bustled with farmers and herdsmen. His sister persistently urged him to study, while Reimund, Ava, and the others pondered uncertain futures,

unaware of the life awaiting them...
...
The sun shone brightly, yet the air in Port Santa had begun to carry a chill.
Abruptly, Lumian stood before Lugano and Ludwig.
"You're finally back!" Lugano exclaimed, relief evident in his voice, as if he had encountered a savior.
Ludwig's appetite had surged once more, and the 1,000 risot had disappeared faster than anticipated.
Another week, and Lugano would have to contemplate using his own funds.
He couldn't allow the child to go hungry; he might resort to eating him!
Lumian chuckled in response, saying, "The commission is over. I'll pay the balance now. Do you want my help to teleport back to Trier, or do you prefer taking a boat yourself or crossing the Dariège mountain range?"
Lugano fell silent, seemingly grappling with a decision.

Chapter 599: If You Have "Power," Use It

Lumian didn't hurry Lugano. He preferred to observe the Doctor's decision-
making.

After a pause, Lugano gathered his courage and inquired, "Will you be bringing Ludwig along in the future?"

"Of course," Lumian replied, glancing sideways at Ludwig, who was devouring a roasted octopus.

Had he not received the 0-01 information from the Church of Knowledge, he wouldn't have considered keeping such a child around. However, Ludwig had proven his usefulness.

In the future, he might serve as another Loki trap.

Lugano swallowed and offered, "I can assist you in caring for Ludwig, so you won't need to factor him in when dealing with matters—unlike how you could simply leave whenever you pleased in the past."

As anticipated... Lumian wasn't taken aback by Lugano's proposal.

He raised his chin slightly and inquired, "Reason?"

Lugano smiled sheepishly and explained, "During this journey, I've witnessed much and faced attacks. It made me realize that Sequence 8s are still insignificant in the mysticism world. They're ill-equipped to handle risks. Yes, if I return to Trier and discreetly wield my Doctor powers, I'll undoubtedly attain middle-class status. It's not inconceivable to ascend to high society, but I fear that garnering too much fame will draw the attention of official Beyonders. Trier isn't as lenient as Port Santa, which is more accommodating to wild Beyonders.

"Furthermore, those dangerous Beyonders are always lurking around us. I refuse to be defenseless the next time I'm targeted."

"If you refrain from participating in mysticism gatherings and solely run a clinic as a doctor, you wouldn't be entangled in dangerous affairs. You could easily handle ordinary thieves and bandits," Lumian countered nonchalantly.

Lugano shook his head.

"The Beyonder who left me his relics, enabling me to become a Planter, once warned me that once I enter the mysticism world, escape is impossible. Beyonder incidents will always surround us. If I'm fortunate, I might survive until natural death, but if I'm unlucky, I'll end up like him.

"At first, I didn't fully believe it, but the events of the past six months have increasingly convinced me of its truth. I did nothing, yet Rue Anarchie collapsed, and a peculiar tree sprouted. Before you hired me, I dreamed of becoming a figure in a painting, unable

to return to reality. Upon waking up, I found myself wanted. This time, all I did was care for Ludwig, staying clear of any involvement, yet I was still senselessly attacked..."
Mm... Lumian's expression grew more peculiar as he listened.
I seem to be the common denominator in all your tales...
Yet, you persist in following me...
Is this another instance of Beyonders encountering mysticism incidents? You didn't encounter those incidents, but me...
Lugano continued,"I've also witnessed Beyonder powers like teleportation and tsunamis. Being just a Sequence 8 no longer satisfies me. I believe I'll find more opportunities by following you."
Lumian gazed at Lugano, unsure if someone had influenced him to insist on following or if Ludwig had somehow "tamed" him to be his "nanny."
Initially, Lumian thought Lugano, as a Beyonder of the Planter pathway, had ties to the Church of Earth Mother. However, despite paying close attention, he hadn't observed any additional communication between his guide and the Fertility Order or the Church of Earth Mother's clergyman. Furthermore, Lugano seemed like a stranger.
Seeing Lumian stay silent, Lugano smiled ingratiatingly and proposed, "I have a gift for languages. I can self-learn Dutanese from the Southern Continent. As long as you pay me 300 verl d'or a month and promise me a share of the spoils, I can continue to be your guide, private doctor, child caregiver, and be half a fighter."
"Sure." Lumian handed over a total of 10,000 verl d'or. "This is the final 5,000 verl d'or from before. Additionally, you were attacked. As per our agreement, I'll pay you an extra 5,000 verl d'or, making it a total of 10,000."
Lugano gladly accepted the payment and began packing.
Lumian seized the moment to count his cash, confirming he still possessed 1,000 verl d'or in gold, 76,000 verl d'or in gold coins, along with other coins, banknotes, and the remaining 2,000 gold risot yet to be spent.
As long as he refrained from acquiring Beyonder characteristics, potion formulas, mystical items, or high-end mysticism knowledge, the money he carried could sustain him for a considerable time.
The following morning, Lumian boarded the ship bound for Feynapotter, adopting the guise of the adventurer Louis Berry. Approaching the first-class suite, he turned to Ludwig, posing a thoughtful question, "In your memories, or rather, Loki's memories, are there any peculiar creatures? They resemble lizards but are quite small. They can crawl into a human's mouth,

appearing transparent and blurry, suspected to be Spirit Body. They have brownish-
green scales and dark-green eyes."
This description deviated significantly from the Starlight Lizards transformed by the Children of the Sea.
Ludwig shook his head.
"No, it's not in the Batings Black Insect's memories either."
Lumian fell silent, observing Lugano as he opened the suite door with the mannerisms of a servant.
Another hour passed, and amidst a whistle, the ship departed Port Santa.
After nearly two hours of sailing, the weather gradually worsened. The waves surged, and the strong winds compelled passengers on the deck to retreat to their cabins.
Observing the dusky sky, the dark clouds stirred by the wind, and the rising waves, many passengers, sailing for the first time, felt a sense of anxiety.
Noticing the confidence of the sailors beside them, they sought reassurance, "This is a common occurrence at sea. It's not dangerous, right?"
A Port Santa native, working as a sailor, replied with a smile, "It's relatively common, but it can be a bit dangerous. If the storm intensifies, we might need to seek shelter in a nearby port. But don't worry. This year's sea prayer ritual was a success. The current Governor of the Sea will protect us and prevent any shipwrecks!"
Governor of the Sea... The passengers became even more uneasy upon hearing the sailor's response.
They had taken part in various sea prayer rituals and celebrations in Port Santa. While enjoyable, they didn't truly believe that the Governor of the Sea could exert any significant influence on the waves.
Amidst their unease, they were astonished to find that the rising waves suddenly subsided.
Despite the dark clouds and strong winds, the seawater seemed to be pressed down by an invisible force, showing no noticeable fluctuations.
The Port Santa natives erupted in cheers.
"Long live the Governor! Praise the Governor of the Sea!"
Witnessing this, the passengers exchanged glances, momentarily speechless.
In the first-class suite, Lumian relaxed in a recliner, sipping undiluted Manzan. On his lap lay a Southern Continent Dutanese introductory textbook.

Clenching his right hand into a fist, he pulled it downward.
A section of the dark clouds in the sky descended, forming a formidable funnel.
Sunlight penetrated the massive hole, brightening the cabin and highlighting Lumian's book.
Retracting his right hand, Lumian flipped through a page of the book. He found the Governor of the Sea's abilities truly advantageous at sea.
Unfortunately, he could only use it for one more day.
...
Late at night in Trier, Angoulême returned to his residence and habitually switched on the radio transceiver.
Before long, a telegram arrived.
Upon seeing "Hidden Blade," Angoulême frowned.
"Two bits of good news and a spot of bad news. Which one do you want first?
"I know. You must want to hear the good news first. I'll get straight to it.
"The first piece of good news is that the humanoid Sealed Artifact has been located and secured. You don't have to worry about the business trip to Feynapotter. You can focus on investigating the Mirror People matter in peace.
"The second piece of good news is that after communication, we've confirmed that the faction controlling the humanoid Sealed Artifact might return it to you. We're willing to facilitate the matter, but you'll need to provide all the information about the humanoid Sealed Artifact in exchange. Of course, it's just a possibility, nothing set in stone. You won't need to make a substantial payment until we reach an agreement.
"Bad news. Heh heh, there's a traitor in your Church. The humanoid Sealed Artifact was lost because of a mole! We're certain of this.
"Go, 007. Your chance to render meritorious service has arrived!"
After reading it in one go, Angoulême felt a sense of relief. This was because after the humanoid Sealed Artifact was lost, the Church's upper echelons suspected a traitor and conducted an investigation, but to no avail. There was indeed an issue with the case leading to the loss of the humanoid Sealed Artifact, but the five Purifiers in charge of that case had been cleared of any wrongdoing during the investigation. They hadn't performed well back then and had merely encountered an accident.
It seems that the mole has concealed himself well... Angoulême muttered to himself.
...

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.
Franca sat by the bed and chatted in the telegram group, waiting for Jenna to return.
Her female companion would visit the Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra once a week to watch a theater performance and only return at midnight. However, the exact day she went was uncertain. Furthermore, she would disguise herself to prevent others from noticing her travel patterns.
Anthony, who lived nearby, had been busy infiltrating a circle of psychology enthusiasts, hoping to come into contact with a true Psychiatrist.
I seem to be the only one with time on my hands. I haven't received any feedback about Mirror People... Franca wasn't the kind of person who insisted on having something on her hands. She excelled in finding joy in life.
While Franca thought about Jenna, Jenna—who had just finished watching the last play—put on a hat with a black veil and stood up to leave the theater, where many spectators were still lingering.
At the exit, she patiently queued up and moved out.
Suddenly, Jenna sensed a slight tremor from one of the items on her.
Instinctively, she reached in and realized that it was the Mirror World Fragment from the Tamara family's tomb.

Chapter 600: Correct Reaction

Has something happened to the Mirror World Fragment? Jenna was taken aback for a moment before she tensed up.

This was unprecedented. The Mirror World Fragment had never exhibited such behavior before, leaving Jenna puzzled as to its sudden activity. Her mind raced, attempting to decipher its significance.

Could there be a disturbance in the special Mirror World itself?

Or perhaps someone in close proximity to me is closely involved with the special Mirror World?

Could this be a lead in Franca's Mirror People investigations?

Jenna's instincts urged her to scan her surroundings, searching for the source of the Mirror World Fragment's disturbance.

Jenna controlled herself just in time as a realization hit her: If this phenomenon was caused by someone closely tied to the special Mirror World, there was a high chance that the "sensation" was mutual. In simpler terms, while the fragment trembled slightly, there should be some anomaly on the person's body, detectable only by themselves. They, too, were searching for the source of the problem.

Under such circumstances, hastily surveying her surroundings might lead to discovery by the other party. A thunderous strike might follow.

Maintaining her composure, Jenna slowly moved out the door, her eyes fixed on the road ahead.

During this process, like many spectators, she turned her head slightly and glanced at the wall clock in the theater's foyer to confirm the time: 11:05 p.m.

After noting the time, Jenna returned to the foyer through the exit.

The spectators around her dispersed, and the place gradually became less crowded.

Jenna's Mirror World Fragment fell silent, no longer trembling abnormally.

Just now, there was no one in the foyer, and the Mirror World Fragment didn't tremble when I watched the theater performance... This means that for the abnormality to happen, both parties need to be close to each other, no more than five meters apart, like when we were squeezing for the exit in the foyer. Now, is everything back to normal because the distance between them has widened again? Jenna's thoughts raced as she fully displayed her theatrical acting skills. Like ordinary spectators, she left the foyer and arrived on the street. She boarded a rental carriage belonging to the Imperial Carriage Company and

paid 2.5 verl d'or in advance, her heart aching.
If the subway and public carriages were still running at this hour, she wouldn't have taken a rental carriage back to Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative from Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra.
...
Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.
Jenna recounted her encounter to Franca and asked, "Did the Mirror World Fragment on you tremble slightly around 11:05?"
"No," Franca replied with unusual certainty.
Without waiting for Jenna to make a judgment, she smiled awkwardly and quickly added, "I don't think so. As you know, my Mirror World Fragment is stored in my Traveler's Bag. Even if there's a tremor, I can't sense it."
As Jenna couldn't help but roll her eyes, Franca tersely acknowledged and said,"Do you suspect that the abnormality in the special Mirror World caused a general change? If that's the case, even if the item is in the Traveler's Bag, I should be able to sense it spiritually. It's impossible to completely ignore it."
"Besides, when we put these two fragments together, there's never been a tremor. The probability of me encountering a Mirror People is very high. Or is it a member of a specific branch of the Tamara family?" Jenna said as she walked to the full-body mirror in the living room. She stroked the surface and whispered the secret subject she wanted to inquire about.
The full-body mirror's surface quickly darkened, surging with illusory water waves.
Jenna began Magic Mirror Divination.
"At approximately 23:05 last night, the area within a ten-meter radius of me...
"At approximately 23:05 last night, the area within a ten-meter radius of me...
"..."
After repeating it three times, the deep, dark mirror lit up.
In the light, Jenna saw herself in a bonnet, the theater exit connected to the theater foyer, and the audience and attendants standing within ten meters of her.
The spirit world faithfully recorded all this information.
The reflection in the mirror held a dynamic quality, not static or rigid. Jenna swiftly observed a woman standing a few meters ahead, abruptly turning to survey the people around her.
Donned in a black veiled hat, the lady, seemingly in her thirties, sported light eyebrows, bright yellowish eyes, and a white complexion from makeup. While not conventionally beautiful, she

exuded elegance through her well-chosen attire.
Despite her refined appearance, the lady appeared to lose her composure, scanning the surroundings as if searching for a lost lover.
"There's something off about her. She reacted to the Mirror World Fragment," Franca remarked as she joined Jenna, analyzing the image in the full-body mirror. "But it's been over an hour, and she hasn't initiated any counter-divination. Is she careless or utterly unfamiliar with the process?"
Jenna nodded.
"Can you discern anything else?"
"Nothing more." Franca suddenly slapped her forehead. "Gosh, we should've asked Anthony to take a look. A Spectator would surely glean more information."
"You're right..." Jenna was caught off guard.
They still weren't used to seeking Anthony's assistance.
Jenna suggested, "Let's get Anthony tomorrow morning. Calling him over this late might lead to misunderstandings. Besides, it's not an urgent matter."
"Yes, he might get the wrong idea," Franca quickly realized.
The next morning, after observing the scene through the Magic Mirror Divination, Anthony pondered and commented, "Her clothes were custom-
made, suggesting a well-off family background... Despite looking a bit lost after surveying the surroundings, she may lack knowledge about the Mirror World and its corresponding fragments. This contradicts her ability to make the Mirror World Fragment tremble. The answer often lies in the point of contradiction... Her walking style indicates good etiquette training, but her status at home isn't particularly high."
Franca couldn't help but twitch her lips as she listened to the newly advanced Hypnotist dissect the target layer by layer. It felt like she had no secrets left from him.
Spectators are truly terrifying!
On the other hand, Jenna listened attentively, finding similarities with character analysis in drama acting class but more concrete and detailed.
In a daze, she felt transported back to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, listening to her teacher's lecture.
"These characteristics won't help us locate her directly. They can only offer certain clues," Anthony concluded.
"Understood. Character profiling," Franca replied in a professional tone.
Anthony took out a piece of paper, picked up a pencil, and began

sketching based on his impressions, intending to track her through various channels.
Casually, Franca asked, "How did you deduce that the lady's clothes were custom-made?"
Having once been a man and transformed into a woman with a potion, she remained fixated on the beauty of clothing and dresses. She didn't care about the store or tailor.
Jenna couldn't tell either, as before becoming a Witch, she hadn't reached the level to customize her clothes.
Anthony looked up at the two Demonesses.
"After becoming a Spectator, especially as an information broker, I've deliberately honed my observation skills. I recognize the materials and characteristics of most of Trier's ready-to-wear shops and the styles of many famous tailors. The lady's dress clearly doesn't come from any ready-to-wear shops."
Franca and Jenna revealed somewhat embarrassed expressions. Fortunately, Anthony was engrossed in his sketch and hadn't noticed their reactions.
...
Port Santa.
Nolfi, clad in a blouse and a light-colored jacket, escorted Batna to the dock.
Batna, sporting a half top hat, adjusted his rapier and cautiously inquired, "Are you really planning to stay here?"
Nolfi calmly responded, "I'm already a combat nun of the Fertility Order.
"It's just now dawning on me that the sea prayer ritual isn't about gaining power and making a pact with an evil god. It's about protection. It's an act of self-sacrifice.
"In the past, members of the Fisheries Guild used their influence and wealth to entice others into becoming the Governor of the Sea and Maidens of the Sea. Now, they've pledged to the Earth Mother's Church and the Fertility Order. Going forward, they'll inform potential candidates of the possible challenges and consequences beforehand, allowing them to make their own choices. I want to stay here and oversee this."
"That's good too." Batna sighed. "Unfortunately, my destiny lies in sea adventures, and I can't remain in one place."
The lovely and endearing Nolfi nodded.
"I understand."
She asked sincerely, "Do you wish to have a child here?"
"No, n-never mind," Batna stammered. "I'm not mentally prepared to be someone else's father."
He didn't want his child to turn into a humanoid lizard in the

future.
Nolfi expressed regretfully, "Alright."
Waving her hand, she turned around and walked away from the dock.
After a few steps, she abruptly turned back, revealing a bright and beautiful smile.
"Regardless, I'm grateful that you could accompany me out to sea."
Without waiting for Batna's response, Nolfi redirected her gaze and hastened her pace, leaving the dock.
Batna stood there, Nolfi's final smile lingering in his mind. Her words of joy echoed in his ears, and he suddenly felt a sense of loss.
After Nolfi's figure vanished from the dock, the adventurer slowly boarded the ship returning to Port Farim.
...
In the evening, inside the ship's bar, Lumian raised a glass of amber sugar wine and addressed the patrons at the bar counter, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm actually a magician. I can showcase an illusionary magic trick for you right now."
He gestured towards the window.
"Look outside."
Instinctively, the patrons glanced out the window and noticed that the surrounding waves had surged to a height of more than ten meters at some point, resembling a mountain.
Just as they blinked, the terror-inspiring scene disappeared once again.
Clap! Clap! Clap! The patrons applauded Lumian's brilliant magic trick.

Chapter 601: Strange Patient

Late at night, amidst another round of cheers for a magic trick, Lumian downed the candied wine in his hand and exited the bar with a smirk.

He could already picture Aurore—if she were around—scoffing, "You're so lame. You're actually using the Governor of the Sea's authority and power to pull off a magic trick. Deceiving those drunkards with the real thing. Is this your prank? You're sure having a blast."

Lumian responded silently, Being able to utilize superpowers and the Governor of the Sea's authority for such matters, rather than in battle, should be what you desire, right? Isn't this the joy and future you yearned for?

In the corridor, illuminated by kerosene wall lamps, Lumian stepped on the creaking floor, making his way back to the first-class suite in the silent, empty surroundings.

Snores and moans occasionally penetrated the walls on both sides. Near the stairs, a room stood open, reflecting the dim yellow light of the fire.

As Lumian passed by, he turned his head and observed the Sacred Emblem of Life, representing Earth Mother, engraved on the wall deep in the room. It portrayed a simple infant amidst wheat ears, flowers, spring water, and other symbols.

In front of the Sacred Emblem of Life stood a man in a brown clergyman's robe. He was less than 30 years old, with clean eyebrows and a light brown beard. Holding a thick book, he preached to the men and women seated in different parts of the room.

Lumian knew this was a prayer room, akin to a small, mobile cathedral with a dedicated clergyman in charge. Common in countries that believed in only one deity, be it on long-distance ships or steam locomotives, they considered the need for believers to quietly pray and listen to teachings.

Lumian, who could already understand Highlander, memorized the words, "Life's precious embrace, the harvest's grace." Retracting his gaze, he entered the corridor, ascending the stairs step by step.

Simultaneously, Lugano, having just finished attending to Ludwig's supper, heard a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Lugano was surprised and intrigued.

This couldn't be his employer. He possessed the key and would simply open the door.

Moreover, it was nearly 11 p.m. Who would visit at such an hour?

Could it be that a woman overheard my boasting on the deck,

believed me, and came to share a pleasant night?
As Lugano started to indulge in fantasies, he heard a feeble male voice.
"I'm here to see Dr. Lugano."
Seeking a doctor... Lugano couldn't help but frown, but he still opened the door.
Outside stood a man wrapped in a thick tweed coat, a stark contrast to Lugano's linen shirt and thin pants.
Lugano scrutinized the visitor.
"I'm Lugano. What's the matter?"
The man's face was pale, his eyes dark, revealing little vitality. Though young, in his early twenties, he exuded a lifeless aura.
The man took a deep breath and weakly said, "You can call me Enio. I heard that you helped several people on the deck discover the true cause of their illness and quickly improved their condition. I want you to treat me.
"I have the money to pay for the consultation."
Observing the fellow's sickly appearance, Lugano sighed and replied, "Come in. Keep your voice down. As you know, I'm the private doctor of a prominent figure. He doesn't appreciate strangers disturbing him."
Once Enio settled on the sofa, Lugano, out of habit, inquired about his condition to conceal his subsequent mystical diagnosis.
"What's wrong with your body?"
Enio paused for a moment before saying, "Since half a month ago, I've become sensitive to the cold and weak. No appetite. Runny nose, repeated coughing, and my condition is worsening."
"Mm..." Lugano nodded, raising his right hand and tapping his forehead, as if contemplating the significance of the patient's narrative.
In reality, he seized the opportunity to activate his Spirit Vision, preparing to discern the other party's illness from the color, brightness, and thickness of his Ether Body.
With a swift glance, Lugano nearly jumped out of his skin.
Is the patient sitting in front of me still alive?
In Lugano's eyes, the once white glow shrouding Enio's Ether Body, signifying overall balance, had turned a somber grayish-black. It was a dire indication of his severe illness, teetering on the edge of death.
Yet, it wasn't this revelation that left Lugano shocked and bewildered. What truly sent shivers down his spine was: the orange glow, symbolizing the health of excretion, detoxification, and other vital organs, had dimmed into complete darkness. No vestige of brightness remained, signaling the complete cessation

of their functions!
Likewise, the yellow hue representing the digestive system, the green indicating the heart and regulatory system, and the blue denoting the throat and part of the nervous system had all dulled and lost their radiance.
Enio's remaining hues were red on his limbs and purple on the surface of his head.
W-what does this "diagnosis" imply?
This meant that Enio was a person with a silent heart, a dormant stomach, and internal organs that had relinquished their functions. Yet, he could still think, move, and speak!
Son of a bitch, where did this monstrosity come from! Lugano, facing such an unprecedented "patient," inwardly cursed, his frame trembling slightly.
He dreaded the moment when the other might unexpectedly utter, "Doctor, I'm cold. Let me borrow your skin. Doctor, I'm hungry. Let me borrow your stomach and intestines..."
Noticing Lugano's silence, Enio anxiously inquired, "Doctor, what illness am I suffering from?"
Illness? Lugano muttered to himself urgently, Snap out of it! Your heart has ceased beating; the absence of flowing blood naturally brings about a chilling sensation!
Those with non-agitating stomachs certainly won't have much of an appetite!
As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lugano pondered for a moment and declared,
"Your condition is grave. I require further analysis and observation to draw conclusions. Can you visit me tomorrow morning?
"Before that, I need to draw some of your blood for research."
"No problem." Despite Enio's lack of confidence in Lugano, he extended his right hand with the mindset that attempting something was better than nothing.
Armed with the necessary tools, Lugano extracted some blood from Enio's body using a needle, rubber hose, and a glass blood collection bottle. Despite their darkened hue, he noted a basic vitality still present. Subsequently, he listened to Enio's heartbeat and detected faint, but existing, beats.
Curious... Lugano seized the opportunity of the consultation and prescription to subtly cast a faint light upon his palm, providing Enio with a simple treatment.
Enio's spirits lifted, and a semblance of strength returned.
"Thank you, Doctor. Your massage and medicine are effective. I appreciate it!" Enio left the suite with a cheerful expression.
None of the previous doctors he had consulted had made the

slightest improvement in his condition. This time, he intended to set sail to the south, take a steam locomotive to the Church of Earth Mother's headquarters for treatment.
Baffled, Lugano observed as Enio left. Soon after, his employer returned.
He quickly recounted the encounter to Lumian, concluding with, "I've secured his blood. Can you find someone to divine the truth?"
"Divination?" Lumian chuckled as he received the blood-filled bottle and knocked on Ludwig's child's room.
"Take a sip and see what knowledge you can glean." Lumian handed the bottle to Ludwig, ensuring no avenue of exploitation slipped by.
Ludwig's expression remained stoic, as if sipping bedtime milk. He drank down the liquid in the bottle without flinching.
Lugano was bewildered, his eyes reflecting surprise and confusion.
After tasting the blood, Ludwig spoke at an adequate pace, "Absent stomach, absent small and large intestine, absent lungs, absent liver and pancreas...
"It's akin to a deceased person relying on mystic forces to persist...
"He won't last a week..."
Wh... Lugano was taken aback that Ludwig not only imbibed human blood but also made somber judgments with a straight face. He was also shocked to learn that Enio truly lacked those organs.
Initially, he believed it was just a loss of corresponding function.
According to Ludwig, wasn't Enio essentially a dead man?
What had he stumbled upon?
"What should we do?" Lugano turned to Lumian.
Lumian couldn't help but chuckle softly.
"What can we do? Locate the captain, the ship's security supervisor, or the priest in the prayer room, and report this matter. They'll handle it."
Lugano nodded and tentatively asked, "But won't this expose me as a Beyonder?"
"Tell them you're Louis Berry's servant," Lumian advised calmly.
"Alright." Lugano was fine with being a servant. After a moment's thought, he asked in puzzlement, "Did you hear any strange sounds at night? I occasionally hear a baby crying."
"Baby?" Lumian asked, shaking his head. "I didn't hear it."
Lugano pondered aloud, "Is there a baby crying on this floor?"
Then, he looked at Lumian.
"Shall I go find the captain now?"
Lumian's eyes flickered as he smiled and said, "Tomorrow morning."

"Alright," Lugano agreed without hesitation.
He preferred waiting for dawn and sunlight before addressing such a peculiar issue. Reporting it at night made him sense an impending, unexpected event.
The sun provided a reassuring sense of security!
Lumian didn't question or provide further advice. He entered his room, freshened up, and went to bed.
However, sleep eluded him. Instead, he half-closed his eyes, anticipating something.
After an indeterminate period, Lumian heard a faint creak.
The door to one of the rooms opened softly.
Lumian swiftly sat up, silently approaching the door, cracking it open.
He saw a figure leisurely walk out of Lugano's servant's room.
It was Lugano, clad in a linen shirt. His eyes were open but oddly vacant and unfocused, his face devoid of expression.
As if sleepwalking, Lugano made his way to the suite's door.

Chapter 602: "Surgery"

Lugano's eyes remained open as he swung open the door to the suite, his gaze vacant. He stepped into the deserted corridor, where only the sound of crashing waves reverberated.

In this moment, everyone, save for the sailor on night duty, succumbed to slumber.

Lugano moved forward, the kerosene wall lamps around him casting an ethereal glow that mingled with the encroaching darkness.

He reached the end of the floor and halted in front of a vivid vermilion wooden door.

Creak. The door groaned open, and the darkness within seemed to swallow every trace of light.

Lugano traversed the obscurity with a blank expression, entering the room. Behind him, the vermilion door was pulled shut by an imperceptible force.

It was a suite. The living and dining areas lay shrouded in darkness, devoid of any candlelit glow. The faint crimson moonlight filtered through the curtains, offering minimal visibility.

At the dining table stood two shadowy figures. One of them appeared aged, with mostly gray hair and dark, deep blue eyes that seemed to absorb the night.

Despite the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, the elder's skin remained well-maintained, adorned in a loose, dark-black robe.

Beside him stood Enio, the brown-haired, brown-eyed patient who had intruded upon Lugano that night, his pale face devoid of life. His vacant gaze fixated on the unadorned table.

Lugano, as if sleepwalking, stood next to Enio, unusually quiet.

The elder in the loose black robe turned his head, fixing his gaze on Enio.

The patient ambled towards the dining table, climbed on it, and lay completely motionless.

The blond elder brandished a sharp scalpel, unfastening Enio's tweed coat, cashmere sweater, and cotton shirt. He pressed the razor-sharp blade against Enio's chest, producing a ripping sound as he sliced through layers of flesh, creating a long wound.

As Enio's chest and abdominal cavity lay exposed to the crimson moonlight, a void greeted the eye.

No stomach, no lungs, no small or large intestines, liver, or kidneys. Only a weakly beating bright red heart, accompanied by a few blood vessels extending from it.

With a swift motion, the old man in the dark-black robe

manipulated the scalpel, his other hand flickering with a faint light as he pressed down.
In a sequence too rapid for the eye to follow, he withdrew the still-beating heart in his left hand.
Enio's chest and abdomen, now empty, displayed only a few non-bleeding blood vessels.
The old man closed the incision with a tight squeeze, sealing it with a flickering light.
Enio's stomach returned to its original state, devoid of any scars.
Throughout this extraordinary procedure, the special patient's eyes remained open, as if untouched by the surgical ordeal.
In that moment, he rolled off the dining table, ambled to the door, and exited the room.
The old man opened his suitcase, revealing glass jars containing pale amber liquid, each cradling various organs: spleen, lungs, liver, kidneys, stomach, and intestines...
Placing these items on the dining table in a peculiar order, surrounding the still gently beating scarlet heart, the old man in the loose black robe took a step back. He recited an ancient, malevolent, yet strangely intimate language.
As the unknown murmur resonated, the internal organs ascended slowly, upheld by an invisible force.
Their final positions varied, resembling the internal organs of a standing human.
The heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys emitted a faint glow simultaneously, outlining a form on the dining table. It lacked a head, limbs, or bones, merely a corporeal essence that grew more defined.
A baby's cry echoed, faint yet tangible.
However, the body distorted, squirmed, and disintegrated in the end.
The old man in the loose black robe sighed with regret.
Strangely, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes were noticeably reduced, and much of his white hair had reverted to light gold.
In an instant, he appeared seven or eight years younger.
Sensing his good condition, the elder turned his attention to Lugano.
Lugano, seemingly summoned, approached the dining table and lay down, awaiting with open eyes.
The elder unbuttoned Lugano's linen shirt, took up the scalpel, and gestured as if deciding where to make the incision.
Suddenly, a loud bang reverberated.
The vermilion door swung open, crashing into the wall.
Crimson flames surged, illuminating the room, climbing the walls

and ceiling, transforming the place into a fiery inferno.
Lumian, adorned in black hair, green eyes, a golden straw hat, a cotton shirt, a black vest, and dark pants, materialized at the door and entered the suite.
He calmly addressed the old man in the loose black robe, "Don't you know he's my servant?"
The elder's eyes narrowed as he readied the scalpel to descend towards Lugano's neck.
However, his right hand refused to budge, seemingly restrained by an invisible force pushing it upward.
In the midst of the rising crimson flames, Lumian paused, displaying no urgency to act. He spoke with intrigue,
"That surgery was quite fascinating—extracting internal organs while leaving the person alive, albeit gradually dying.
"And you used those organs for a ritual, rejuvenating yourself. Meanwhile, you nearly brought forth a peculiar lifeform."
Surprise flickered in the elder's dark-blue eyes.
"How do you know?"
Haven't you just arrived in pursuit of your servant?
And no one entered before you!
Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.
"You don't need to know."
I still have a few hours of Governor of the Sea authority. Isn't it easy to 'see' something in these waters?
Sensing Lumian's confidence, certainty, ease, and absence of hostility, the elder fell silent briefly before expressing, "Life is the most precious, so life becomes the finest sacrifice and ingredient."
He refrained from divulging details about the surgery or ritual, choosing instead to expound on his philosophy and the truth he sought.
Praising and blaspheming life simultaneously? Lumian arched his eyebrows, finding it vaguely reminiscent of Lady Moon, Madame Night, and the bestowed of the Great Mother.
Carefully assessing the black-robed elder behind the dining table, Lumian, upon confirming his gender, temporarily set aside his sudden anxiety.
Gazing down at the motionless Lugano on the dining table, Lumian casually inquired, "How did you control my servant?"
The elder fixed Lumian with a penetrating gaze, as if probing the depths of his intentions. He pondered, weighing the decision to preach the truth or engage in a confrontation to eradicate the issue.
After a brief silence, he spoke in a resonant voice,
"He's a Blessed of the Great Mother. He heard the cries of the Son of

God."
Great Mother? Lumian's scalp tingled at the term.
Had it not been for the Sea Governor's authority, Lumian would have launched a full-scale attack without allowing the elder a moment to react or explain.
Regardless, even if he eliminated the elder, spirit channeling remained a viable option. Moreover, the elder could be fed to Ludwig!
Though taken aback by the elder's possible reference to Lugano as a Blessed of Earth Mother, Lumian swiftly dismissed the apparent meaning.
He was certain that Lugano was human and harbored no unusual bloodlines.
Following Lugano's injury at Solow Motel, Jenna collected his splattered blood and conducted Magic Mirror Divination according to Lumian's subsequent instructions.
In an instant, Lumian deciphered the elder's true meaning.
The Beyonders of the Planter pathway are all Blessed of the Great Mother?
Where does Earth Mother stand? Planter is the main pathway of the Church of Earth Mother...
Could it be... the Great Mother reigns over multiple pathways, akin to the Celestial Worthy and Mr. Fool? Planter and Sower? The names bear a striking connection...
As Lumian's thoughts raced, his focus intensified on the existence of the Son of God. Cordu's empty infant cradle and the honorific title of Lady Moon nurturing a deity flooded his mind.
Dammit, why is it that the Great Mother seems entwined with children, Sons of God, and babies? Does that entity have a penchant for offspring? Lumian smirked superficially.
"It seems your Son of God hasn't truly been born."
The old man in the loose black robe suddenly became fervent.
"He's already born in the spirit world, but He's yet to step into the real world.
"Don't you see? Just revealing His form made me a few years younger. If He were truly born, I'd instantly regain my youth!"
Who knows what malevolent creation you've unleashed... Lumian criticized and said, "You plan to shape the Son of God's body with just this fragment of life?"
The elder was taken aback.
"This is a ritual bestowed by the Great Mother's revelation. It's undeniably effective!"
Lumian smiled.
"That Enio is unmistakably an ordinary person. The ritual's effects

won't bode well. If it were a Beyonder with a robust life force, the outcome might be entirely different."
The elder instinctively concurred, "Indeed. That's why I intended to examine your servant's internal organs..."
At this juncture, the elder halted, casting a wary glance at Lumian.
With a beaming smile, Lumian proposed, "Have you ever thought of sacrificing your own internal organs?
"If you don't offer yourself as a sacrifice, how can you showcase your devotion to the Great Mother and your reverence for the Son of God?
"Don't fret; the Son of God will revive you and bestow youth upon you!"
As he concluded his words, a dark-green light condensed in Lumian's right hand.

Chapter 603: Organs Again

The dark-green light morphed into a beam, slamming into the old man's chest and sinking into the loose black robe, akin to sunlight, unstoppable.

Already appearing seven to eight years younger, the old man's expression twisted, and every inch of exposed skin displayed signs of melting.

His aura rapidly waned.

Simultaneously, a burst of vigorous life force erupted from his body. Under the melting skin, flesh and blood writhed, resisting the mutation.

The black-robed old man's eyes darkened, and he abruptly faded away.

In an instant, a hazy face emerged from the armchair at the dining table, blending with the brown wood, about to gain clarity.

At that moment, a cascade of flames descended from the crimson-flame-covered ceiling, soaking the armchair and swiftly setting it ablaze.

Before the brown face could fully materialize, it succumbed to the raging flames, forced to retreat.

Lumian lost sight and sense of the black-robed elder subsequently.

While surveying the surroundings, Lugano, lying on the dining table, suddenly sat up and jumped down. He stared at Lumian with vacant eyes, like a wandering zombie.

Lumian chuckled, raising his right hand and pointing at Lugano.

With this gesture, specks of brilliance shimmered in his eyes, as if the cosmos had descended.

Lugano found himself in an empty night sky, surrounded by twinkling stars.

He stood rooted to the ground in a daze. Without any subsequent actions, he resembled a machine that had lost its energy and controller.

Having settled his servant, Lumian surveyed his surroundings once more.

Yet, his eyes brimmed with flowing and burning crimson flames, and the black-robed elder's figure remained elusive.

Lumian's expression remained stoic as he splayed the five fingers on his right hand, clenching them into a fist.

His body suddenly grew heavy, and the flames surrounding him surged towards him like a river converging into the sea, drawn by an invisible force.

Bottles, organs from various body parts, and lightweight items in the room soared towards Lumian.

On the wooden coat rack near the door, the transparent figure of the black-robed elder protruded, pulled away by an unseen force.
He fought with all his might, but he couldn't resist the pull towards Lumian. It was akin to a piece of wood caught in a flood or a thin leaf fluttering in a fierce wind.
Lumian's left hand was already raised, and the crimson, nearly white flame in his palm rapidly turned white under the intense suction force, forming a minuscule ball.
Layers of compressed white-hot fireballs were unleashed, and the weighty and fearsome suction force dissipated.
Pa! The black-robed elder finally landed on the floor, his vision completely engulfed by the blazing white fireball.
Rumble!
The blazing white fireball collided with the Beyonder conducting the sinister surgery and strange ritual. The explosion's sound echoed into the distance but was muffled by the darkness shrouding the room, preventing it from permeating.
In the midst of such a violent explosion, no one on the ship heard or sensed anything awry.
Rumble!
The black-robed elder's body was shredded by the devastating explosion. Countless corpse fragments were instantly charred or consumed by bright flames, scattering across every corner of the living room and dining room.
With spirit channeling at his disposal and Ludwig providing support, Lumian reveled in the authority of the Governor of the Sea and the nearly demigod-level power it bestowed. He cared not for what the enemy might transform into.
Incredible. *Is this what it's like to be a demigod?* Even if it's just an illusion... Sadly, it won't last beyond six in the morning... Lumian sighed, directing his gaze at the burning corpse fragments.
A quick inspection revealed that the black-robed elder's flesh had rapidly charred or turned to ashes. It was as if frost had met magma from a volcanic eruption.
In a matter of seconds, only the heart, liver, spleen, lungs, kidneys, intestines, and stomach remained in the room, along with a grayish-white half-charred brain.
Wh... Even with his feet, Lumian could tell that something was awry.
Except for the brain, the remnants of the enemy were all internal organs.
The malevolent surgery he had just completed involved extracting someone's internal organs to let them live as if nothing happened!
At the same time, the peculiar ritual he performed utilized the

complete set of internal organs to attempt to reconstruct the so-called Child of God's body!
All internal organs—it was hard for Lumian not to draw a connection.
Could it be that this fellow's internal organs were extracted before, and he survived by piecing together others' internal organs, becoming a Beyonder? What's this called? Human alchemy? If it's true, who took his internal organs? Lumian pondered silently.
The stars in his eyes swiftly dissipated, and Lugano returned to the real world.
From a distance of four to five meters, Lumian raised his right hand and smoothly swung it.
Smack!
Lugano felt the impact of an invisible force against his face.
With a sudden jolt, his eyes gradually cleared of their blank stare.
The first sight that greeted Lugano was the crimson flames falling around him, extinguishing before causing any havoc.
Then, he noticed charred body parts, scattered internal organs, glass jars filled with light-amber liquid, and organs soaked in them.
Am I still dreaming? *Is this a nightmare?* Just as this thought crossed Lugano's mind, the image of his employer, Louis Berry, with black hair and green eyes, appeared before him.
Son of a bitch, this dream took an unexpected turn! Lugano shuddered and involuntarily inquired, "What happened?"
Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "What dream did you just experience?"
What dream? Lugano confirmed his wakefulness and recollected, "I dreamed of my childhood. My mother stood at the door, urging me to come home for dinner. She even sang a nursery rhyme from my hometown...
"She's been gone for almost ten years. I miss her dearly. I kept walking towards the door, but I couldn't reach her..."
At that moment, Lugano realized that this wasn't their suite. He exclaimed in shock,
"What happened?"
With a smile, Lumian responded, "You slept until midnight and suddenly sleepwalked all the way here. An old man had plans to operate on you, remove your kidneys, and slowly turn you into a patient like Enio."
The more Lugano listened, the more fear gripped him. Earlier, he had wondered how someone like Enio, who had lost most of his internal organs, could still be alive, albeit turning weak—only to realize that he was so close to turning into a similar figure!

"Hiss..." Lugano gasped and asked with trepidation, "Where's that old man?"
"That's all that remains." Lumian gestured at the internal organs and the grayish-white, half-charred brain on the ground.
Without giving Lugano a chance to sigh, Lumian instructed, "Bring Ludwig here."
It was also almost time for his midnight snack.
Lugano hastily left the suite, grateful for choosing to follow Lumian to the Southern Continent.
Otherwise, he would be at the mercy of such situations elsewhere!
Lugano believed this matter had nothing to do with Lumian. He had brought it upon himself. If it were Trier, he might have encountered a similar patient who had lost internal organs.
Lumian watched him leave, raised his right hand, and stroked his chin.
Simply hearing the infant's cries from the failed ritual can influence Beyonders of the Planter pathway to sleep and act in a sleepwalking state, receiving corresponding orders?
Isn't this too exaggerated? It's an absolute suppression on the Planter pathway...
I could understand a similar phenomenon if that ritual had succeeded, and the Child of God was truly born. Yet, it's already this powerful despite being a failed product?
Even with the limitation of its range, it's still terrifying... *Is there a key reason I don't know?*
Moreover, can only Beyonders of the Planter or Sower pathways hear the Child of God's cries? Can the Apothecary pathway, which can interchange with the Planter pathway, also hear it?
Amidst Lumian's thoughts, Lugano led Ludwig into the suite.
Faced with this gruesome scene, Ludwig pressed his hand to his mouth and yawned.
"Where's the food?"
Lumian didn't make any immediate requests. Instead, he turned to Lugano.
"Guard the door."
With the prior experience of the blood-drinking incident, Lugano could vaguely guess what was about to happen. He didn't dare face it directly. Upon hearing Lumian's instructions, he heaved a sigh of relief and jogged to the corridor, closing the vermilion door behind him.
Only then did Lumian gesture towards the scattered internal organs on the ground.
"Do you need me to roast it for you?"
Ludwig shot a quick glance at Lumian.

"Don't you find it irksome? These are all human organs."
Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.
"In my eyes, this is already on par with a monster's insides."
He then wore a self-deprecating expression.
"Moreover, isn't directly consuming Beyonder characteristics to advance a Beyonder equivalent to eating someone?"
Ludwig remained silent, taking a few steps to the side. He squatted down, picked up the old man's heart, stuffed it into his mouth, and began to chew.
Crimson blood slowly trickled from the corner of his mouth.
Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, patiently waiting for Ludwig to finish his meal and digest.
After seven to eight minutes, Ludwig retrieved a white handkerchief from his coat pocket and wiped his mouth.
"These internal organs belong to different people. Some are Beyonders, some are ordinary folks, some old, some teenagers...
"There are traces of human refinement. The aura of life is rather mixed and impure...
"They will be controlled and influenced by the refiner...
"Having been refined, the person doesn't know that he's been through this.
"He has complete memories of the past. This is something that can't be achieved by refining an ordinary body.
"He followed Enio on board, hoping to extract the remaining organs and complete the ritual before Enio reached his destination..."
Ludwig recounted the knowledge and memories he had absorbed in a straightforward tone.

Chapter 604: School of God's Descent

Under the glow of the crimson moon, Ludwig, clad in a two-piece pajama set and a small coat, recounted the memories and knowledge he had absorbed from the black-robed elder's half-charred brain and internal organs. He did so methodically, like an emotionless time-reporting machine.

"Only the brain belongs to him. His name is Prinpino.

"Due to his advanced age and weakened body, he delved into mysticism. Unwittingly, he drew the attention of the Great Mother and acquired a wealth of secret knowledge, evolving into a Beyonder..."

Upon hearing this, Lumian muttered with a mix of mockery and fear, Despite gaining the Great Mother's attention, did he not turn pregnant?

Are you truly a follower of the Great Mother?

Ludwig continued, "I'm uncertain when Prinpino started losing his internal organs. I failed to absorb the pertinent knowledge and memories.

"Similarly, the time he became a human refinement product remains unknown.

"His philosophy is:

"Humanity, once the favored and proudest children of the Great Mother, fell into folly, aging, and weakness due to their detachment from her.

"Only by allowing the divine son of the Great Mother to descend into the world can humanity be saved. They can enter Paramita and regain their original form.

"When the time arrives, the Great Mother will return to the real world she governs."

Using the gender-oriented pronoun "she" to refer to the Great Mother instead of "She"... This implies that, in the eyes of individuals like Prinpino, pregnancy and childbirth are still feminine matters. A mother must be a "she"... This differs from the Nightstalkers... Lumian glanced at Ludwig and nodded approvingly.

Ludwig calmly detailed Prinpino's attempts and some of his abilities.

"The birth of the Child of God requires a specific body composed of various people's internal organs...

"This isn't the entire descent ritual. It lacks a crucial component...

"Prinpino possesses potent self-healing abilities. As a product of human refinement, he's immune to the influence of many Beyonder powers.

"He can indirectly control humans corrupted by the Child of God or specific Pathway Beyonders who have had direct contact with special patients. The range is 100 meters, and they must be unconscious..."
Upon hearing this, Lumian suddenly recalled a Sequence 7 Vampire of the Apothecary pathway.
Such Beyonders wielded formidable self-healing abilities and could craft Blood Slaves resembling their own marionettes!
Lumian refrained from interrupting Ludwig, patiently awaiting further details.
"He's adept in surgery and can directly heal others. He knows a ritual enabling a human to survive for a period even without internal organs.
"He can merge with trees and wooden articles for concealment, acquire a sturdy shell, and evade detection.
"He can stimulate the growth and reproduction of creatures, including but not limited to rats, fleas, bedbugs, fungi, and various plants. However, it drains his vitality. His vitality can be replenished through an unsuccessful Child of God descent ritual. Every nine rituals necessitate a batch of internal organs to be replaced...
"He can also inflict curses upon others, summon malevolent creatures, consume his life for the casting of a few nefarious arts..."
As Ludwig concluded, Lumian realized Prinpino's Beyonder powers were diverse. He possessed partial Vampire abilities and embodied certain traits of the Earth pathway's Planter, Doctor, and other Sequences. Simultaneously, he wielded a limited grasp of dark arts, expending vitality for their execution.
It's akin to the amalgamation of the Apothecary, Planter, and Heretic Spellmaster pathways, yet it's not exhaustive... Such a boon exists? The Great Mother truly reigns at the apex of these three pathways... Lumian reflected momentarily before taking Ludwig's hand and departing the suite.
He instructed Lugano, stationed at the door, "Summon the priest from the prayer room and inform him of all pertinent details you are aware of."
After issuing his directive, Lumian deliberated before appending, "Locate the captain first, then seek out the priest."
"Alright," Lugano assented reflexively before inquiring, "And yourself?"
"Of course I'm going back to bed. Should they seek an audience with me, they may wait until tomorrow morning." Lumian gestured dismissively, guiding Ludwig along the dimly illuminated

corridor to his suite.
Am I solely accountable? Lugano mused to himself.
He suddenly noticed he stood alone at the suite's threshold, surrounded by scattered internal organs. A shiver traversed his spine, prompting him to hasten toward the captain's quarters.
...
Ten minutes later, inside the black-robed old man's suite.
The priest named Montserrat and the captain, Pedro, scrutinized the situation while listening to Lugano's detailed account.
Nervously, Lugano disclosed to them that he was a Beyonder, a Doctor of the Planter pathway. Enio sought him out due to his exceptional skills in treating patients. Later, during the late night, he experienced a sleepwalking episode. When he reached the suite, he found his internal organs almost removed. Fortunately, he was rescued by his employer.
Throughout the entire narrative, Lugano only omitted Ludwig's consumption of blood, sharing everything else he knew.
Pedro, the captain with the handsome brown beard, quipped half-seriously,
"Could it be that your employer killed a passenger in this suite and deliberately scattered his internal organs everywhere, concocting such a sinister Warlock tale to deceive us?"
Uh... Lugano found himself momentarily speechless.
Indeed, this possibility couldn't be entirely dismissed!
Father Montserrat, garbed in a brown clergyman's attire, shook his head.
"After confirming Enio's physical condition, we'll determine the veracity of this story."
"I concur." Captain Pedro stroked his beard and gazed at Lugano. "What's your employer's name?"
"Louis Berry," Lugano truthfully replied.
"Louis Berry..." Pedro's eyes narrowed. "The adventurer who hunted down the Demon Warlock, Louis Berry?"
Montserrat's eyes widened slightly.
"The one collaborating with the Church in Port Santa to covertly thwart malevolent forces disrupting the sea prayer ritual, Adventurer Louis Berry?"
Wh... My boss' reputation is so renowned? Did the Church of Earth Mother inform all the clergy that Louis Berry is a friend and collaborator? Yes, this ship departed from Port Santa. The priest on board must have been the first to be informed... Lugano had considered it, but he hadn't expected his employer's name to be so impactful.
Without hesitation, he affirmed, "It's him, Adventurer Louis Berry."

Just as Lugano concluded his account, the entire ship was abruptly sent airborne, landing atop a wave dozens of meters tall.
No dark clouds or torrential rain accompanied the phenomenon, and there were no violent winds or lightning.
After vaulting between the pitch-black waves several times, the steamship gently descended onto the sea's surface, restoring calm to its surroundings.
Captain Pedro surveyed the wrecked suite and the sliding windows, then turned to Lugano with a deep inquiry, "Is this the power of your employer? I heard stories of someone practicing sea wave magic at the bar tonight. Was that a genuine wave?"
"Yes." Although Lugano was uncertain about the events unfolding, he attributed the display of nature's power to his employer.
He added, "He's extending his greeting."
Captain Pedro and Father Montserrat fell into contemplative silence.
After more than ten seconds, Pedro addressed Father Montserrat, who seemed to be in his thirties,"Does the Church possess knowledge of such surgeries and rituals?"
Montserrat glanced at Lugano, indicating that the conversation need not be private.
The priest reflected for a moment before responding in a solemn tone, "There exists a faction of misguided Mother believers who contend that the decline of the modern world and the debasement of humanity result from their estrangement from the Mother.
"They are determined to employ any means to usher in the so-called Child of God into the real world and invoke the Mother's descent through the return of the Child of God.
"We refer to them as the School of God's Descent."
Unconvinced, Lugano inquired, "You can summon a Child of God simply by using the internal organs of ordinary people?"
While he lacked knowledge about the specific surgery and ritual, he could deduce that internal organs were a crucial component.
Montserrat contemplated the remaining human organs in the suite and responded gravely,
"The Child of God is the Mother's child, and humans are also Mother Goddess's children."
Does this imply that, fundamentally, no one is superior or inferior, and they can serve as ingredients with quantity compensating for any shortcomings? Lugano grasped the essence of the priest's statement, realizing how many rituals involving blood sacrifices could be explained by this theory.
Father Montserrat offered no further explanation and turned to Lugano.

"Convey to your employer that we will take charge from here. Assure him not to worry."
"Very well." Lugano sighed with relief.
...
The next morning, Lumian woke up promptly and realized he no longer possessed the power of the sea, preventing him from tapping into the Governor of the Sea's authority.
He took a regretful sip of his light beer and commenced writing to Madam Magician, detailing the issues with the School of God's Descent and the purported birth of the Child of God in the spirit world.
Swiftly, the messenger returned, carrying Madam Magician's response:
"Encountering the School of God's Descent—I can't ascertain whether the issue lies with you or Lugano.
"The so-called Child of God has already been born in the spirit world—it's merely propaganda, you understand? Similar to the Church of The Fool's Holy Bible—just listen but don't take it seriously.
"Nevertheless, comparable incidents are unfolding, and they are brewing and evolving. This actually ties back to you. It originated from Cordu's empty cradle, the child Madame Pualis 'lost.'
"Additionally, based on various sources, Madame Night didn't perish in Fourth Epoch Trier. She encountered or acquired something that advanced the matter of the Child of God.
"Besides her, the Sinners' Voisin Sanson managed to escape Fourth Epoch Trier for unknown reasons. What he encountered remains unknown...
Voisin Sanson is still alive? Lumian was initially taken aback by the revelation in the middle of the letter, but a smile soon crept across his face.
At that moment, a knock echoed on his bedroom door.
"Who is it?" Lumian, aware that it was Lugano outside, asked casually.
Lugano replied fearfully through the wooden door, "I-I heard a baby crying again!"

Chapter 605: Lingering Effects

Hearing the cries of a baby again? Is he pestered by the so-called Child of God? Lumian held Madam Magician's reply, unfinished, and adjusted his sitting posture with amusement. He gazed at the door and said, "Come in."

Lugano turned the handle and cautiously pushed open the door, uncomfortably stopping in front of Lumian.

His actions and demeanor, combined with his thick eyebrows, large eyes, and square face, made him appear rather comical.

"Isn't that evil Warlock, the old man n-named Prinpino, already dead? Why can I still hear the cries of a baby?" Lugano inquired with concern, his tone reflecting it.

Having consulted the just-awakened Ludwig, he had received an answer that he hadn't heard the baby's cries.

Lumian playfully shook the letter in his hand and chuckled.

"There are two possibilities. One is that Prinpino's accomplices on the ship also possess the ritual to summon the Child of God. The other possibility is...

Lugano pressed impatiently, "What is it?"

Lumian glanced at the Doctor and grinned.

"Perhaps the unborn Child of God has taken a liking to you and wants to choose you as his surrogate mother. Thus, even though Prinpino is already dead, he's unwilling to leave you and continues to linger by your side. Normally, he can't be seen or sensed."

Lugano's scalp tingled as he listened. Ignoring the question of why he was a mother and not a father, he stammered, "W-what should I do?"

"No rush." Lumian smiled.

"There's no need to hurry in such circumstances." Lugano felt like his internal organs might be devoured by the so-called Child of God at any moment, leaving only an empty cavity.

"Of course," Lumian said in a relaxed state. "Aren't you still alive? Since you're not dead, it means the situation isn't very serious. You can take it slow. There's no hurry."

That seems to be the case... Lugano, caught up in the conversation, nodded and asked in confusion, "Must I die before the problem becomes serious enough for it to become urgent?"

Lumian chuckled and said, "No, it means there's zero need to rush. "If you're already dead, what's the hurry? Can I revive you?"

In short, there's no need to rush? Lugano was taken aback.

Though he harbored doubts, his employer's ability to crack jokes and play pranks reassured him.

Evidently, his employer didn't view the baby's cries as a grave

concern!
Only then did Lumian unveil his true speculation.
"There's a third possibility. The corruption you suffered upon contact with Enio won't dissipate so quickly, and it's highly likely that it won't vanish naturally. Consequently, you'll still form a connection with the unborn Child of God."
"Then, how do I eliminate the corruption?" Lugano accepted this explanation and believed that a solution existed.
Lumian didn't immediately respond to his question. He let Lugano stand in front of him as he perused the rest of Madam Magician's reply.
"Considering your link to the Child of God and the evil god's angel sealed within you, encountering a member of the School of God's Descent isn't a mere coincidence.
"However, your interpreter and guide are of the Planter pathway—that raises other issues. It's only natural for you to encounter matters connected to the Great Mother.
"As for the problem, ponder it and inquire within yourself. I won't spoon-feed you the answer. Conspirers need to employ their brains more..."
Observing this, Lumian looked up at Lugano without uttering a word. The Doctor's body tensed, and a thin layer of sweat trickled down his back.
"Is—is there any other problem?" Lugano stammered.
Lumian reclined in his chair and said contemplatively, "Clearing corruption is an entirely separate course in mysticism. I need to grasp the specifics before providing an answer."
Having underscored the significance, he inquired, "Have you encountered similar situations before? Like peculiar infant cries, mystical occurrences linked to births, sorcery entwined with mothers, and so forth."
Lugano dared not be careless, fearing that if the corruption wasn't rectified promptly, he might end up as an organless being.
He meticulously sifted through his experiences over the years. After a moment, he tentatively said, "There's something I'm not sure if it's relevant..."
It was clear that he was reluctant to discuss the matter.
"How am I supposed to know if it's relevant if you don't tell me?" Lumian didn't care about privacy.
After a brief pause, Lugano cleared his throat and said, "Didn't I mention that I became a Beyonder by obtaining a friend's relic?"
"Yes, did you murder that friend?" Lumian inquired deliberately.
Lugano hastily shook his head.
"No, he committed suicide."

"Suicide?" Lumian raised his eyebrows, finding this matter intriguing.
Lugano finally gathered the courage and spilled it out in one go, "When I worked as a bounty hunter, I utilized the hidden mountain ranges in the Dariège mountain range for smuggling operations. I moved things back and forth, making a decent sum. I even aided some wanted criminals in escaping overseas. Tanko was one of them, but his escape wasn't from Intis to Feynapotter. Instead, he fled from Feynapotter to Intis.
"Eventually, he discovered a secluded valley deep within the mountain range and built a field of his own. He cultivated crops, tended to livestock, and kept to himself. I regularly visited, supplying him with essentials like salt, sugar, fabric, and other goods. In return, Tanko imparted mystic knowledge.
"I never imagined leading an ordinary life, with me out there adventuring and becoming a bounty hunter. Mysticism held a strong allure for me, and the teachings imparted by Tanko seemed invaluable at times.
"Tanko could be an enigma. Sometimes, he'd fall into brooding silence, his temper as hard and unyielding as stone, as if wrestling with inner demons. Other times, he'd be buoyant and loquacious, curious about everything around him.
"Every so often, he'd confess to straying from the Mother's teachings, descending into the depths of darkness. He'd lament how he drifted further from his true self, suffering the consequences. Occasionally, he'd voice suspicions about the Church, believing it to be deceptive, claiming the true Mother had departed long ago..."
In that moment, Lugano couldn't help but draw parallels between Tanko's cryptic musings and the philosophy of the School of God's Descent, as recounted by Father Montserrat.
Was this encounter a foreshadowing, planted in the past? Lugano drew in a deep breath, sensing an ominous shiver down his spine.
He rushed out his words.
"Last autumn, I revisited Tanko. We sipped his brew and discussed various things beyond the mountain.
"Out of the blue, he spilled that he couldn't endure his decadent, sinful self any longer. The demon lurking deep within him was gaining control. Tanko wanted to end his life before it consumed him entirely. His dying wish? I deliver his stuff to Torres, the capital of Gaia Province, and hand it over to a Church of Earth Mother clergyman, preferably a Blessed.
"I pretended to agree, talked him out of it, and thought he had abandoned the idea. But the next morning, I found him dead in the

field where he'd harvested grain. Golden wheat ears sprouted from his body. And, get this, he had several female reproductive organs.
"I was freaked out. Felt like I was dealing with a monster.
"Now, for us bounty hunters, a dead monster is a good monster. It's material for a paycheck.
"Summoning courage, I went through Tanko's things. Found a golden blob, like a grain seed, but half the size of a fist, next to him.
"Based on Tanko's mystic know-how, I suspected this blob was the root of his Beyonder powers.
"After much internal wrestling, I debated whether to stick to our agreement and send this relic back to the Church. But in the end, greed got the better of me, and I devoured the blob.
"I'm a guilty man. Broke my promise. Hoping the Sun forgives me."
Lumian listened in silence, a chuckle escaping his lips.
"You just ate it like that?"
Lugano grinned sheepishly and explained, "Yep, that's right. I only learned potion formulas after becoming a Beyonder and diving into mysticism. I didn't want a repeat of that experience, so I got obsessed with buying formulas."
"You're lucky. A few years earlier, and surviving that would've been tough. We might've crossed paths in the Dariège mountain range, you as a monster and me as a monster hunter," Lumian recalled President Gandalf's research and mocked Lugano.
Internally, Lumian muttered, Emperor Roselle was right. The ignorant are fearless... Something's obviously off with Tanko. He probably got tangled with the evil god's faith, corrupting the Beyonder characteristic he left behind. Eating it directly... no wonder you encountered the School of God's Descent and heard baby cries. Easy to be corrupted and influenced, encountering patients like Enio.
Uneasy, Lugano asked, "Was the Planter ingredient I consumed the root of the problem?"
He had ingested it a year prior, and even advanced. Was there no resolution to the problem?
Lumian, seemingly avoiding Lugano's beseeching gaze, feigned deep consideration as he perused the concluding segment of Madam Magician's response.
"I've pondered your earlier caution and have some theories, but presently, I cannot divulge them to you. I can only hint that Amon and the person behind Him must have orchestrated something beforehand to divert the Celestial Worthy's attention from the pertinent issue.
"In essence, this situation seems advantageous for you and the rest

of us. For now, it's best to feign ignorance and refrain from delving into it.
"If troubled by infantile cries, seek aid from a clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother."
Wh... Did Madam Magician anticipate Lugano's lingering effects in advance? It seems so. She could discern the root cause of Lugano's plight... Lumian looked up, offering Lugano a reassuring smile.
"The remedy to purge the corruption lies in seeking aid from Father Montserrat."
That's it? After all my exposition? If there's truly no alternative, I would've taken my chances with the priest... Lugano's lips twitched as he mustered a strained smile.
"Very well, thank you, sir."

Chapter 606: Faith Conversion

At 8 a.m., in the prayer room on the third floor of the cabin, Lugano stepped in. Father Montserrat, draped in a brown priest's robe, was already preaching. Five or six individuals were scattered in the rows of chairs before the Sacred Emblem of Life.

Without disturbing the sanctified ambiance, Lugano chose a spot at the front, near a supplicant.

As Father Montserrat concluded his sermon and closed the Holy Bible, the supplicants rose, spread their feet, and raised their palms high, chanting in unison, "Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"

Lugano instinctively turned his head, noticing a tightly-wrapped up supplicant with brown eyes and a pale complexion in the same row—Enio, the special patient who had lost his internal organs.

H-he's not dead? Wait, isn't the evil warlock, Prinpino, supposed to be dead? *Why is Enio, the special patient, still alive?* Lugano was stunned, almost convinced he'd encountered a ghost.

Being a Sequence 8 of the Planter pathway, he was ill-equipped to handle ghosts.

But then, Lugano observed that Enio's face wasn't as deathly pale as before. The brilliance in his eyes had returned, and vitality coursed through him.

Wh... Lugano raised his hand, tapping his glabella to activate his Spirit Vision.

He observed Enio's Ether Body, no longer as ashen as before. Whether it be the yellow hue symbolizing the digestive system, the orange hue denoting detoxification and organ excretion, or other shades, they had reverted to a semblance of normalcy, albeit faint and thin.

Is that even possible? Hadn't he lost his heart, liver, spleen, lungs, intestines, stomach, and kidneys? Lugano stared at Enio as though he were an aberration until Enio pivoted and pleasantly recognized him.

"Doctor, your treatment works wonders. I feel like I'm recovering!" Enio exclaimed joyously.

And this was just the initial treatment sans pinpointing the specific cause!

Lugano's lips twitched stiffly.

"That's reassuring, indeed."

"Are you also a follower of Earth Mother?" Enio beamed, pleasantly surprised.

I'm not. Spare me the talk of Mother God or Mother... As an Intisian, how can I subscribe to the Earth Mother faith? Lugano

gestured toward Montserrat, evading a direct response.
"I need to discuss matters with the priest."
Enio nodded.
"When can I seek further treatment in the morning?"
You don't require treatment anymore. It's time for recuperation and repose... Lugano grumbled, forcing a smile.
"In about an hour."
"Thank you, Doctor!" Enio waved, exiting the prayer room.
When only Lugano and Father Montserrat remained, Lugano hushed his voice, gesturing toward the door.
"H-how was he healed?"
Father Montserrat, still relatively youthful with sincere eyes, smiled and responded, "Thanks to Earth Mother, his fortune was favorable.
"As a Doctor yourself, you must be aware that internal organs can be transplanted as long as they maintain a certain level of vitality. For the ritual to succeed, Prinpino utilized his Beyonder powers to sustain the vitality of those internal organs. Moreover, the set he employed was extracted from Enio, eliminating the need to consider transplant rejection effects.
"Furthermore, Enio remained alive, relying on mystical power to uphold a certain level of vitality. This was a crucial factor."
"Did you perform surgery on him last night and transplant all his internal organs back?" Lugano was enlightened.
Father Montserrat nodded.
"For regular surgeons, this is an operation with nearly zero chances of success. Even if successful, keeping the patient alive long enough to navigate the most perilous stage is challenging. However, for us, it falls within our capabilities."
Indeed... Compared to ordinary surgeons, Beyonder Doctors like us wield mystical powers akin to miracle-workers... Lugano sighed, dismissing further concern about Enio. Turning to Montserrat, he inquired with worry, "Father, I heard a baby crying again.
"Has that so-called Child of God set his sights on me?"
Father Montserrat reassured him, "Fear not. It's an inevitable repercussion of the corresponding corruption. It will gradually dissipate over time. If you're concerned about any unforeseen events or accidents on your path, I can help you eliminate them now."
Is that so? You're merely a Sequence 8 Doctor. Do you possess the capability to rid me of the remaining corruption? Set up an altar and seek Earth Mother's aid? Lugano remained skeptical.
"Thank you, Father!"
Montserrat gestured toward Lugano's previous spot.

"Follow the believers' example. Close your eyes, listen to my preaching, and simultaneously, pray to Earth Mother. Remember, it's specifically to Earth Mother, no other deity."
"Understood." Lugano resumed his seat, crossed his arms, and shut his eyes.
As Father Montserrat delivered his sermon, Lugano silently echoed the verses of the Holy Bible. Gradually, his thoughts blurred, and amidst the discourse, Lugano discerned a mother's gentle murmur and felt the comforting warmth of her embrace.
His tense heart eased, reminiscent of seeking solace in his mother's arms after childhood bullying.
It was a blend of dependency, reliance, and a sanctuary for the mind.
Unbeknownst to him, tears trickled down Lugano's cheeks, as if purifying his body and soul.
Slowly, his emotions settled, dispelling the fear and unease.
"Done." Father Montserrat's voice seemed to waft from the distance, reaching Lugano's ears.
Opening his eyes, Lugano raised his right hand, wiping away the tears.
Standing up, he lifted his hands.
"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"
It was an almost reflexive response.
In that moment, sunlight streamed through the window, casting a faint golden glow upon the prayer room, as if heralding forthcoming abundance.
Father Montserrat nodded in satisfaction.
"Earth Mother has purged the corruption from your body. Tonight, pay attention and see if you still hear the baby's cries."
"Alright, Father!" Lugano replied, his body and mind now at ease.
The next morning, he awoke with a sense of happiness.
Throughout the night, he experienced no dreams of a beckoning mother, nor did he hear the cries of the so-called Child of God.
Filled with joy, Lugano, after serving Ludwig breakfast, hurried to the prayer room to share the uplifting news with Father Montserrat.
Father Montserrat gazed at him for a moment and asked with a smile, "Are you interested in embracing Mother Earth?"
"Me?" Lugano hesitated before inquiring, "Are you willing to accept the conversion of a heretic?"
Father Montserrat smiled and replied, "In the Mother's eyes, there are no heretics. There are only children who are or are not willing to return home."
Lugano's heart wavered, reflecting on his past actions of merely

going through the motions in cathedrals—praying, listening to preaching, and attending Mass. He hadn't truly believed in any deity, and the Church hadn't provided substantial assistance.
Moreover, if I truly become a believer in Earth Mother, I might gain access to subsequent potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients from the Church or the three Orders... Even if not, I'll surely receive corresponding mysticism guidance... Lugano hesitated, finding various excuses to convince himself.
Father Montserrat patiently waited, not pressuring him. He simply smiled, anticipating Lugano's decision.
Eventually, Lugano raised his hands.
"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"
He responded to Father Montserrat's proselytization in this manner.
Father Montserrat's smile broadened as he extended his arms.
"Welcome home."
Those words oddly warmed Lugano's heart. It felt as though, after years of wandering and adventuring, he had finally returned home.
Fatigue lifted, and a sense of grounding enveloped him.
"Praise Mother Earth." Lugano crossed his arms over his chest.
Father Montserrat nodded and commenced his true preaching.
"You believe in the source of life, the mother of all things, the propagation of the fertile land, the symbol of the crimson moon and reproduction, as well as the destination and the starting point of everything..."
Lugano listened attentively, committing the information to memory.
Though not devout yet, this might become his future sanctuary. He recognized the importance of presenting his good side at all times.
...
Upon returning to the first-class suite, Lugano glanced nervously at Lumian, who was engrossed in studying the Southern Continent's Dutanese, and stammered, "I-I've changed my faith to Earth Mother."
As a fellow Intisian, would he despise and scorn me?
Lumian looked up and chuckled.
"Then make sure to radiate maternal brilliance. Ludwig is counting on you for some fresh fish."
He doesn't mind at all... Lugano mumbled, not willing to let Ludwig go hungry. He embarked on a busy day.
Late at night, after tending to Ludwig until bedtime, Lugano pondered briefly and decided to visit the prayer room.
If the door was still ajar, he intended to offer a prayer before

retiring for the night.
He had to make a good impression right from the beginning!
Lugano treaded the dimly lit stairs, approaching the prayer room with cautious steps on the creaking floor.
His footfalls grew hushed, wary of disturbing those engaged in prayer and potentially interrupting Father Montserrat's embodiment of Mother Earth's teachings through reproductive activities with a female believer.
Reaching the door quietly, Lugano extended his right hand, gently pushing it open.
The wooden door eased ajar, revealing a small gap without a sound.
It's not shut tight... *Is he truly in the midst of reproduction?* Lugano cautiously peered into the opening.
He observed the crimson moonlight enveloping the prayer room and Father Montserrat, draped in a brown priest's robe, standing before the Sacred Emblem of Life. Folding his arms, Father Montserrat swayed gently, as if cradling a newborn child.
However, there was nothing within his embrace.

Chapter 607: Smell of Food

Lugano's scalp tingled as he found himself in a surreal encounter with Father Montserrat, bathed in the glow of the crimson moonlight. The sight of the priest, cradling an invisible child in his arms, sent shivers down Lugano's spine.

Is he carrying a child?

An invisible child?

The so-called Child of God?

Frightened by the association, Lugano tried to quickly shut the door before the owner noticed, as if he had wandered into the wrong room. He slipped away without making a sound.

Suddenly, Father Montserrat's voice echoed in the air.

"Are you here for prayer?"

Lugano's eyes tightened, and like a startled wild cat, he swiftly turned and sprinted towards the staircase.

All he could think about at that moment was his formidable employer!

However, what met his eyes was utter darkness. No staircase with a wooden floor in sight.

In the shadows, clusters of pitch-black weeds, with plump wheat, swayed in eerie silence.

Lugano's body tensed, uncertain about the unknown that awaited him in this abyss of darkness.

"Why did you run?" The weeds parted, revealing Father Montserrat, holding an invisible baby. Behind him, an illusionary, unusually massive oak tree stood tall.

Next to the weeds, the oak tree was covered in abnormal growths, forming a chillingly simple and ominous Sacred Emblem of Life.

As Father Montserrat, clad in a brown priest's uniform, appeared less than three meters away, Lugano swallowed hard, offering a feeble excuse.

"It's late. I didn't want to disturb you."

Father Montserrat remained cradling his arms, wearing a faint smile.

"What did you see?"

Every hair on Lugano's neck stood on end, and cold sweat broke out on his back.

Struggling, Lugano pointed at Father Montserrat's empty embrace, asking with difficulty, "Why are you doing this?"

Father Montserrat responded with a significant tone, "We're all Mother's children."

Lugano didn't dare to delve further and nodded repeatedly.

"Yes, yes, yes. We're all Mother's children."

Father Montserrat didn't allow him to navigate through with platitudes. He deliberately added,
"The child of the Great Mother."
Great Mother... Although Lugano had anticipated this answer, his heart almost skipped a beat, and his mind went blank upon hearing it.
Seeing that Father Montserrat had made it explicit, Lugano had no choice but to inquire,
"Aren't... aren't you a follower of Earth Mother?"
Father Montserrat felt no remorse about betraying the Church of Earth Mother. He maintained a warm smile and explained, "Earth Mother is a facet of the Great Mother, a projection. In this role, she watches over the lands of betrayal and the children who have strayed from the Mother's embrace."
Gulp... Lugano instinctively swallowed, uncertain about how to counter Father Montserrat.
Having joined the Church of Earth Mother just a day ago and attended only two sermons, he lacked the profound theological knowledge to challenge such heretics.
He could, of course, outright deny it. After all, Montserrat's explanation sounded ominous. If the priest's words were true, with the Earth Mother Church's resources and factions, the so-called Child of God should have already been born in the real world, and the Great Mother would have returned. Yet, that hadn't happened.
The current scene and the invisible pressure silenced Lugano, refraining from outright denial.
What if he enraged Father Montserrat completely?
Father Montserrat continued, "All creatures in this world are the children of the Great Mother. Some were conceived by her, some are descendants of these deities, and some, like you and me, were directly transformed from the flesh and blood of the Great Mother. We share the strongest connection with her!"
Internally, Lugano couldn't help but retort, I was born by my mother, not transformed from the flesh and blood of the Great Mother... However, his smile remained, more grimacing than joyous.
"Don't you find the Great Mother's believers sinister and terrifying?"
Father Montserrat smiled and reassured, "There's no need to fear the return of the Great Mother. How can a mother hate her child?
"You might not know, but there are many worlds beyond ours. The creatures in those places flourish under the watch of the Great Mother, constantly reproducing and growing. I've never heard of any species being eradicated. Instead, their numbers are

increasing.
"Moreover, it's the Great Mother who granted us life. It's her prerogative to reclaim the life she bestowed upon us. We should cooperate willingly."
Cooperate my rear end, you son of a sow! Lugano wasn't bewitched. Suddenly, he drew his concealed revolver and fired two shots at Father Montserrat.
Without confirming the effectiveness of the shots, he swiftly turned and sprinted toward the dark expanse filled with black weeds.
Though the destination within the dark depths was unknown, perhaps harboring great peril, staying here seemed even more hazardous!
"Waaa!"
Abruptly, Lugano heard an almost ethereal cry of an infant.
It was exactly the same as the sounds he had heard several times before.
Lugano's expression froze, and his pace slowed as he ran.
His eyes gradually filled with emptiness, and he turned around. Step by step, he approached Father Montserrat, who was cradling an invisible baby, and the illusory, colossal oak tree.
"That's our mother...
"The mother who gave us life...
"She's willing to accept anyone who repents, every child who returns home...
"If she wants to take back the life she bestowed upon us, then let her. She has the prerogative to reclaim what she gave..."
Listening to Father Montserrat's abnormally ethereal yet seemingly close voice, Lugano gradually developed a strong and heartfelt acceptance.
Yes, that's my mother...
Why would she harm me?
She can take back what she had given...
Lugano walked faster and faster until he stood beside Father Montserrat.
Instantly, he felt warmth and relief. It was the scent of a mother's embrace.
Gradually, he experienced an indescribable moist sensation, as if a kitten were being licked by a female cat.
How comforting... Lugano half-closed his eyes.
At that moment, he heard his mother's favorite nursery rhyme
—from behind him.
Why is Mom behind me? Shouldn't she be in front? Lugano wondered vaguely.

Then, he heard his mother shouting behind him, "Don't go over!
"Don't move forward!
"Danger!"
Don't go over... Don't move forward... Danger... Lugano shuddered, his vacant eyes regaining a certain vigor.
He saw where he was—the illusory colossal oak tree and moist, warm, squirming flesh petals sprouting from it. Half of his body was already enveloped in the flesh petals, slowly pulling inward.
This was the motherly embrace he had just experienced.
Lugano's pupils dilated, and a chill ran down his spine, causing his hair to stand on end.
He exerted strength against the viscous liquid-covered flesh with both hands, swiftly pulling away.
Father Montserrat, cradling an invisible baby, appeared beside Lugano, wearing a warm smile.
"Return. Return to the Mother's embrace and revert to our original form."
Despair gripped Lugano.
He wanted to confront the priest, but sadly, having consumed two potions—Planter and Doctor—he realized that, apart from enhanced strength and proficiency with farming tools and a scalpel, he lacked Beyonder powers directly applicable in combat. These powers included predicting the weather, identifying and nurturing seeds, treating ailments, healing wounds, stitching up souls, bestowing life, or possessing outstanding surgical abilities.
In the past, Lugano had relied on the combat techniques and marksmanship learned as a bounty hunter to match a Planter's strength and firearms.
Nevertheless, not resisting at a moment like this meant certain death. Lugano, an adventurer with a history of killing, faced immense fear as he fired at Father Montserrat and drew a sharp scalpel.
...
In Lumian's first-class cabin suite,Lumian, still engrossed in the Dutanese textbook under the kerosene wall lamp, heard a knock on the door.
Perplexed, he stood up, opened the door, and found Ludwig.
Ludwig, clad in grayish-white checkered pajamas top and pants, spoke gravely,
"Lugano has encountered an accident. Hurry up and save him."
An accident? Lumian arched his eyebrows.
Knowing that Lugano could still hear the baby's cries, Lumian had discreetly heightened his surveillance and attention on the servant, including just now.

But how could an accident occur when Lugano had entered the Earth Mother Church's prayer room?
Ludwig continued, "I couldn't sense his scent after he entered the prayer room."
"What scent?" Lumian inquired casually, already forming a vague suspicion.
Ludwig responded nonchalantly,"The smell of food."
Lumian stretched his neck and wrists, regarding Ludwig thoughtfully.
"You deliberately sniffed his scent."
Ludwig's chubby cheeks displayed an expression that said, "What's so odd about that?"
"If he perishes and you're busy elsewhere, who will assist me in gathering food?"
"That's a valid point." Lumian grinned.
...
In the darkness, enveloped by black weeds, Lugano's scalpel sliced through the air as he attempted to strike Father Montserrat.
"Waaa!"
The baby's cries echoed once more, leaving Lugano in a momentary daze, teetering on the edge of losing control.
With the invisible baby cradled in his arms, Montserrat manifested on the colossal illusory oak tree and smiled down at Lugano.
"Don't resist. We originated from the Mother, and we shall return to her."
Just as the priest, with clear eyes and a warm smile, finished speaking, a knock on the door reverberated in the seemingly endless darkness, echoing among the weeds with abundant wheat.
Upon hearing the polite knock on the door, Lugano had an inexplicable thought.
How polite—to knock at the door in such a situation...

Chapter 608: The Way to Find Prey

The rhythmic thumping echoed only three times before escalating into a resounding bang.

As the sturdy wooden door flung open, the corridor bathed in the glow of kerosene wall lamps revealed a darkness entwined with overgrown weeds. Crimson flames surged forth, casting an eerie illumination.

In Lugano's gaze, the illusion of the oak tree abruptly dissipated, along with Father Montserrat, cradling an unseen infant in his arms.

Amidst the fiery chaos, the weeds withered, and the shadows dispersed. Lugano found himself "returned" to the humble prayer room, now aglow with the crimson moonlight.

Lumian, sporting a golden straw hat, emerged at the entrance. His eyes scanned every nook, yet Father Montserrat remained elusive.

Powers akin to the Paramita world merged with other traits, albeit incapable of creating a sufficiently independent world separate from reality. It resembles Demon Warlock Burman gaining unique abilities through a forceful transition of pathways... *Where is he hiding now?* Drawing from Ludwig's knowledge from his food, Beyonders of the School of God's Descent can conceal themselves in woodwork. Although I can't confirm Father Montserrat's corrupted affiliation with the School, the influence of the Great Mother is evident... Lumian swiftly assessed the unfolding scenario.

The lack of resistance from Father Montserrat, who refrained from fleeing or hiding, didn't surprise Lumian.

Performing the wave magic in the ship's bar had been a casual display, not wanting to waste the temporary Governor of the Sea authority. However, the subsequent use of the colossal wave to "greet" Captain Pedro and Father Montserrat wasn't mere showmanship.

Unaware if the School of God's Descent incident had concluded or if hidden Great Mother devotees lingered on the ship, Lumian deliberately showcased the might of a demigod Governor of the Sea to instill fear!

If there were no other Great Mother adherents or lurking threats, his "greeting" actions could be seen as showmanship. But if danger lurked, it would make the elusive elements cautious, forcing them to retreat deeper into hiding. Lumian planned to let the ship reach the next port, leaving the Church of Earth Mother authorities to deal with them.

Father Montserrat, seemingly unwilling to face the adventurer Louis Berry head-on and his demigod prowess, opted for

concealment, biding his time until the ship docked.
Had Lugano not luckily or unluckily stumbled upon the priest cradling the unseen infant, Father Montserrat might have continued portraying himself as a competent clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother, avoiding any confrontation with Louis Berry.
"F-Father Montserrat is a believer in the Great Mother! He was cradling an invisible baby!" Lugano hastily reported to Louis Berry, now realizing the gravity of the situation.
Cradling an invisible baby... He could be hiding within the ship's woodwork. Lumian scanned the surroundings, inspecting chairs, the floor, and the Sacred Emblem of Life adorning the wooden wall.
In an abrupt realization, he felt a stir in his heart as he approached the Sacred Emblem embodying Earth Mother.
Adorned with symbols of wheat, flowers, and spring water at the periphery, at its core lay a simple depiction of a baby.
A baby!
Advancing further, crimson flames radiated, setting the wooden floorboards and chairs ablaze.
Coming to a halt before the Sacred Emblem of Life, Lumian extended his right hand, gently caressing the baby's face.
The wood instantly deteriorated, exuding a yellowish pus.
It seemed that the depiction of a baby surrounded by wheat and flowers had long decayed, shedding tears of blood.
There's a huge problem with the Church of Earth Mother... Lumian narrowed his eyes.
While unable to pinpoint the elusive Father Montserrat, he unearthed decay and darkness lurking beneath the veneer of the Church of Earth Mother.
Observing the charred remains of the woodwork and finding no trace of Father Montserrat, with more wooden hiding spots on the steel steam ship, Lumian turned and addressed Lugano, "Take me to the captain's cabin."
"Alright." Lugano visibly relaxed.
Exiting the prayer room, the crimson flames within swiftly extinguished, ceasing their advance.
Inside the captain's cabin, Pedro, spotting a handsome brown beard, grimaced as adventurer Louis Berry approached.
Experienced as he was, he knew that there might be trouble on the ship.
During the School of God's Descent incident, Adventurer Louis Berry had only dispatched a servant to explain matters. Now, here he was personally visiting!

What did this signify?
It pointed to a more severe complication!
Without awaiting the captain's inquiry, Lumian calmly asserted, "Father Montserrat has succumbed, aligning himself with an evil deity. He likely colluded with the School of God's Descent's evil warlock."
Captain Pedro's mind jolted as if struck by a rod, momentarily buzzing and going blank.
After a brief pause, he cautiously inquired, "Have you already killed him?"
"Not yet," Lumian truthfully responded. "He escaped the prayer room and is now in hiding. Dispatch a telegram promptly, reporting this to the Church of Earth Mother and the Feynapotter government. My servant will provide the details."
In the face of Louis Berry's authoritative directive, Captain Pedro yielded without resistance. He shifted his attention to Lugano, absorbing the account of his conversion and Father Montserrat's description, cradling an invisible infant.
Upon hearing the revelation, Pedro wore a bitter expression and admitted, "I did sense something amiss with Father Montserrat, but I never anticipated it to be this grave."
"What's the issue?" Lumian inquired.
Pedro sighed, explaining, "He's a Favored, a Beyonder of the Earth pathway, the most orthodox clergyman. Typically, he needs a Blessed's help to conduct Mass, preach to believers, and guide others into the Church. However, he's the only Favored on this ship without a Blessed."
"I initially thought the shortage of staff in Port Santa was due to the sea prayer ritual, so I didn't pay much heed. But now, with Father Montserrat's fall..."
Only with the assistance of a Blessed can one conduct Mass and preach to believers. There's no Blessed following him... Lumian had previously learned that Favored of the Church of Earth Mother needs at least one second-in-command Blessed for their decisions to be considered valid. Otherwise, it risks being perceived as an influence of an evil god or a demon... An evil god... That Great Mother? Wh... Combined with recent events and his prior knowledge, Lumian suddenly grasped why the Church of Earth Mother maintained two distinct systems—
Blessed and Favored—rather than merging them.
Madam Magician of the Apprentice pathway had mentioned occasional influence from the Celestial Worthy, unsure if it was a revelation from Mr. Fool.
Similar to the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings

overseeing the Apprentice, Seer, and Marauder pathways, the Great Mother likely stood atop the Planter, Apothecary, and Villain pathways.
As a result, Favored Beyonders of the Planter and Apothecary pathways would also be under the influence of the Great Mother. The origin of the revelation, whether from Earth Mother or the Great Mother, remained unclear. Confirmation required the input of Blessed from pathways outside these two. Simultaneously, Blessed monitored the status of the Favored!
That explains it... Indeed, there's a profound and serious reason behind this seemingly absurd, wasteful, and unreasonable system design, Lumian concluded. Without further words, he instructed Captain Pedro, "Send the telegram."
After the captain relayed Father Montserrat's situation to the Feynapotter government and the Church of Earth Mother, Lumian contemplated how to locate Father Montserrat.
Considering the vast sea surrounding them, unless Father Montserrat possessed teleportation or exceptional underwater travel abilities, he could only be hiding somewhere on the ship.
Lumian dismissed the idea of involving his Major Arcana card holder for such a trivial issue and resolved to devise a solution himself.
Could I use the ship's megaphone to insult the Great Mother, provoking Father Montserrat to reveal himself? The challenge lies in the inability to lock onto a target, potentially yielding less-than-optimal results...
Burning all the ship's woodwork? Seems like a last resort due to the presence of valuable goods in wooden crates...
Borrowing a bottle of Prophetic Concoction from Franca? It requires a fresh corpse. Additionally, if Franca is involved, I could get her to directly employ Magic Mirror Divination...
Playing the Symphony of Hatred bone flute and informing passengers to cover their ears prior to that? But it only reduces damage without averting the effects...
Right, ask Ludwig if he recalls Father Montserrat's small...
Also... Yes, I can give it a try!
Lumian quickly came up with several solutions and decided to systematically test each one, reserving seeking help as a final option.
He bid farewell to the captain and, under the cover of night, led Lugano back to the first-class cabin suite.
"Do you recall Father Montserrat's scent?" Lumian inquired of Ludwig.
Ludwig shook his head.

"No direct contact."
"Fair enough." Lumian turned around, offering a reassuring smile to Lugano. "I have an experiment in mind. Work with me."
"What kind of experiment?" Lugano asked, a tremor of fear evident.
Lumian gestured towards the window.
"Go to the deck. It's more open there."
Uneasily, Lugano descended to the deck, bathed in the crimson moonlight. His employer pulled out a full-body silver armor from his Traveler's Bag, revealing an inscrutable smile.
Lumian recalled the Pride Armor's particular disdain for items from the Earth and Evernight pathways.
What if it wasn't an item but a Beyonder?
How would it react?
Could this hatred be harnessed to pinpoint Father Montserrat's location, given he was at least a Doctor, at a certain distance?
Lumian wasn't entirely sure, but he intended to experiment with Lugano, a fellow Beyonder of the Earth pathway, to explore the possibilities.

Chapter 609: Useful Armor

Lumian shot a quick smile at Lugano and fixed his gaze on the Pride Armor, carefully observing its reaction.

"What experiment? To test the effects of this armor?" Lugano questioned, a mix of apprehension and confusion in his voice.

As soon as he finished speaking, the air on the dark deck, bathed in the crimson moonlight, suddenly solidified.

In the next instant, the empty armor produced a radiant broadsword, and an unseen force locked onto Lugano.

Wh... Before Lugano could react, the silver-white full-body armor surged forward, the gleaming broadsword poised to strike.

In a split second, Lumian positioned himself in front of Lugano. His body expanded abruptly, almost tearing his linen shirt and black pants.

Bang!

Lumian's massive fist collided with the Sword of Dawn, creating a metallic clang that resonated through the air.

Only then did Lugano shake off his bewilderment. Though unsure why the empty armor attacked him, he instinctively turned and sprinted away.

After covering some ground, the Pride Armor halted and stood silently.

The Sword of Dawn, fashioned from light, dissipated, turning into beams of light that dispersed the crimson moonlight, casting a dawn-like ambiance upon the dark deck.

This sensation vanished in the blink of an eye.

Lumian, not daring to turn his back on the Pride Armor, repositioned himself and gauged the distance between the armor and Lugano.

About 20 meters... factoring in Lugano's running speed, the sensing range is approximately 15 meters... Lumian swiftly concluded. His body reverted to its original form, and a confident smile returned to his face.

It was enough. A fifteen-meter range sufficed on the ship!

He stowed away the Pride Armor and addressed Lugano, who was still making his way to the bow, "The experiment is over."

Huh? Lugano came to a sudden halt, realizing that Lumian had already stashed the peculiar silver-white full-body armor back into the mystical item cleverly disguised as a coin bag.

Relieved, he jogged back, curiosity etched on his face as he inquired, "Did the experiment succeed?"

"Very successful," Lumian replied, sporting a radiant smile.

Though Lugano didn't grasp the experiment's significance, he had

a hunch that Lumian might be exploring a way to locate Father Montserrat.
Upon reaching the first-class suite, Lumian promptly instructed Lugano, "Go to the captain and ask him to gather all the Beyonders of the Earth pathway on the ship. Oh, and the Beyonders of the Apothecary pathway. I'll be back after capturing Father Montserrat. It doesn't matter if they don't show up. They'll bear the risk themselves."
Unsure if Captain Pedro was aware of every unstable element on the ship and every Beyonder, Lumian planned to monitor the Pride Armor later to prevent it from targeting hidden wild Beyonders. Allowing Pedro to handle this process first would lighten his load.
As Lugano left the suite, Lumian turned to Ludwig, who had resumed his meal.
"Keep an eye out later and see if there's any 'food' secretly lurking here."
Ludwig, mouth full of cake, signaled his agreement.
Waiting for the captain's arrival, Lumian patrolled the cabin's top floor with the Pride Armor in his arms, but Father Montserrat remained elusive.
Before long, Pedro entered the suite with the suspected security supervisor and a passenger in a low hat.
Lumian didn't delve into details and gestured toward the sofa.
"Wait for me here."
Without waiting for a response, he pressed down on his golden straw hat and exited the room.
Upon reaching the staircase, Lumian "pulled" out his silver-white full-body armor. Gripping the Sealed Artifact's armpits firmly with both hands, he methodically patrolled each level of the cabin.
Whenever he approached a distance less than 15 meters from his suite, Lumian exercised extra caution, yet the Pride Armor refrained from attacking anyone.
Could it be that, beyond five meters and with several layers of obstruction, the armor wouldn't exhibit any additional reactions? Lumian speculated as he descended floor by floor.
After nearly half an hour, he descended to the cargo cabin at the bottom.
Before maneuvering past stacks of wooden crates, the Pride Armor in Lumian's grasp suddenly quivered, breaking free from his control.
The silver-white full-body armor morphed a radiant broadsword. Advancing in two strides, it swung at a wooden box tucked in the corner.
With a resounding clang, the wooden box splintered, and a

handful of steel ingots spilled out.
At the same moment, Montserrat's clean, youthful visage emerged from the broken box, materializing his entire body.
Confronted by the gleaming broadsword of light once more, the priest's initially sturdy frame bulked up, as if transforming into a formidable brown bear.
Bang! With a powerful palm strike, he sent the Sword of Dawn hurtling, landing atop a wooden crate of goods behind him.
This strength rivaled that of a true giant bear!
As Father Montserrat skillfully parried the Pride Armor's onslaught, Lumian, donned in a linen shirt, black vest, and a golden straw hat, materialized swiftly beside a stack of wooden crates behind him.
"Hmph!"
Two beams of white light shot from Lumian's nostrils, hitting Father Montserrat before he could even react.
Instantly, the priest's gaze lost focus, and he crumpled to the ground, unconscious.
With this turn of events, vitality surged through his body like a steam engine operating at full throttle.
The robust vitality manifested as an incredibly potent self-healing ability, swiftly restoring Father Montserrat's spirit.
The Spell of Harrumph bore a resemblance to Psychic Piercing, both targeting the Spirit Body and proving challenging to defend against. However, while the latter induced uncontrollable pain, trapping the target, the former added a sleep-inducing or unconscious state to the Spirit Body—a different form of harm.
Since it was an injury, it could be healed.
Empowered by the vigorous vitality's transformation, Father Montserrat's closed eyelids twitched as his eyeballs moved beneath them.
He nearly woke up before hitting the ground!
Yet, for Lumian, a mere second of restraint from the Spell of Harrumph was sufficient.
Considering that Father Montserrat might also be a product of human refinement, some abilities might not be effective. Lumian lunged at him, extending his right hand.
In his open palm, crimson flames coiled and compressed, forming a solid-looking sphere.
Simultaneously, the Pride Armor raised the Sword of Dawn once more.
Just as Father Montserrat opened his eyes and instinctively regained balance, he caught sight of Louis Berry's jade-green eyes, the dangerous crimson fireball almost white, and the broadsword

of light slashing toward his head from the corner of his vision.
With only a moment to react, he twisted to the side to evade the Sword of Dawn, but Lumian pressed the crimson, nearly white fireball against him.
Boom!
In a resounding explosion, Father Montserrat was sent hurtling through the air.
Flesh and blood erupted from his right shoulder to his abdomen, bones fractured, and squirming internal organs were laid bare.
His right arm dangled, on the verge of detachment.
Yet, the robust vitality within Father Montserrat persisted. Flesh and blood wriggled within the gaping wound, miraculously healing.
Thud!
Father Montserrat crashed to the ground, accompanied by the heavy footsteps of the Pride Armor and the luminous slash of the broadsword.
Lifting his finger, the blood and flesh expelled from his body during the explosion swiftly coalesced, transforming into a blurry, thin blood-colored figure.
This figure lunged at the silver-white full-body armor, enveloping it and infiltrating its form.
Abruptly, the cargo hold was bathed in Sunrise Gleam. The blood-colored figure dissolved, gradually fading away.
The Sunrise Gleam was gentle, sparing Father Montserrat the instinctive need to shut his eyes. Consequently, his gaze reflected crimson, nearly white flaming ravens.
A dozen or so Fire Ravens circled Lumian, who casually kept one hand in his pocket. Their eyes fixed on Montserrat, tracing distinct trajectories as they soared.
Their aim was clear—to shred the target's body and set each piece of flesh ablaze, preventing recovery even with his potent self-healing abilities.
When each fragment was spaced 20 to 30 centimeters apart, their self-healing powers struggled to reunite them!
This wasn't flesh and blood magic!
Father Montserrat's pupils dilated, and his mouth instinctively opened, emitting a sinister yet intimate voice.
With the accompanying voice, a dense darkness descended, and wheat-filled weeds sprouted, devouring the Sunrise Gleam that bathed the warehouse.
In the darkness, some of the crimson, nearly white Fire Ravens lost their way, unable to traverse the "distant" space. Gradually, they dissipated—only a fraction successfully reaching Father

Montserrat.
Amidst thunderous explosions, Father Montserrat's form turned translucent, giving rise to a colossal illusory oak tree in its place.
The oak tree stood unscathed amid the explosion and flames, and amidst the aftermath, the mangled form of Father Montserrat materialized on a branch adorned with mistletoe. He cradled his arms, as if holding an invisible infant.
Gazing at Lumian, he wore a genuine smile.
So you're not a demigod...
"Waaa!"
For the first time, Lumian heard the ethereal, hollow cry of the baby.
"Wah wah wah!"
Amidst the relentless cries, Lumian felt his vitality draining away. Gradually weakening, even his consciousness began to waver.
The depleted vitality seemed to flow towards the invisible baby in Father Montserrat's embrace, transforming into its nourishment.

Chapter 610: "New Life"

In the face of the infant's cries, which gradually weakened him, Lumian teleported immediately to Father Montserrat's side, launching a powerful attack to disrupt the impending impact.

Yet, in that very moment, he observed the Pride Armor freezing in place upon hearing the infant's cry. Suddenly, it crouched down and plunged the Sword of Dawn into the ground covered in dark weeds.

Dammit! Directly employing Hurricane of Light? Lumian's scalp tingled. Without bothering to confirm, he shifted the teleportation destination, vanishing into the darkness of the illusory oak tree, and reappeared on the ship's deck.

He had long recognized that Father Montserrat's weed wilderness was inferior to the Madames' Paramita. It failed to sever the deep connection between the inside and outside, nor could it prevent teleportation. Its sole capability was restraining various sounds and the aftermath of battle, akin to the Bottle of Fiction, if not less. Nonetheless, this wilderness had unique abilities.

As Lumian's figure faded into the dark wilderness, the Sword of Dawn embedded in the ground by the Pride Armor shattered, transforming into countless light fragments, creating a formidable storm that engulfed the area.

The plump wheat-filled weeds were sliced into pieces, leaving the ground barren.

Father Montserrat, perched on the oak branch, couldn't dodge in time. He only managed to manifest his body into something resembling wood before being consumed by the Hurricane of Light.

The illusory, hollow cry of a baby abruptly ceased.

When the Hurricane of Light subsided, Father Montserrat stood frozen in place.

In the next moment, his wood-like body, covered in brown bark, split open, revealing deep crevices.

Pa, pa, pa. Father Montserrat's body fell to the bottom of the oak tree, piece by piece. The incisions were smooth, and blood seeped out.

Flesh and blood were instantly absorbed by the illusory oak tree's roots, leaving nothing behind.

In the middle section of the oak tree, the bark split open. Squirming, moist flesh grew out, expanding into a hole.

A human head appeared, squeezed and ejected.

In the blink of an eye, the naked human was "born" by the illusory oak tree. It was Father Montserrat.

He retained his adult form, his body wet and partially covered in a

dirty, translucent white membrane.
New life!
With the aid of the weed-covered darkness, the illusionary oak tree, and the invisible baby, Father Montserrat found a new lease of life!
His brow smoothed, and his eyes regained a youthful gleam. Enormous bat-like wings, shrouded in dark skin, erupted from his back, propelling him from the heart of the colossal oak to his silver-white full-body armor.
The Pride Armor rose, summoning light into its hand, forging a sharp spear.
Launching the elongated lance with relentless force, it sliced through the air, embedding into Father Montserrat's chest.
Father Montserrat's bat-like wings enveloped him, and his form shattered into palm-sized black bats.
In a mesmerizing dance, the bats circled behind the Pride Armor, reforming into Father Montserrat, adorned with a grimy membrane.
Father Montserrat's body expanded, morphing into a colossal bear. From his palms sprouted sharp claws etched with enigmatic patterns.
With a forceful swipe, he etched five deep gouges onto the Pride Armor's back, unveiling its hollow interior.
The Pride Armor froze, and the air itself seemed to still.
Before Father Montserrat could launch another assault, he noticed the silver-white full-body armor pivoting without warning.
Condensing hammers, axes, and flails made of light, it slashed at Father Montserrat frenziedly.
Father Montserrat lowered himself, shrinking to the cleared ground, inching towards the illusionary oak tree.
The ground beneath him caved, forming a rift.
In that moment, Lumian, sensing the end of the Hurricane of Light, teleported back into the darkness.
To his surprise, Father Montserrat stood unscathed, devoid of the brown priest's attire.
Undeterred, Lumian retrieved the Symphony of Hatred bone flute from his Traveler's Bag.
Seizing the moment while the Pride Armor entangled Father Montserrat, preventing the transmission of sound to the outside world, Lumian aimed to play a melody learned from Port Santa's various celebrations—composed by a Church of Earth Mother Saint for a bountiful harvest.
Typically, Lumian would don the Flog boxing gloves, "teleport" closer, stimulate some desire or emotion in Father Montserrat

through a punch, and then play the Symphony of Hatred to trigger Flog's aftereffects. However, Lumian abandoned this well-practiced routine.
The peculiar illusionary oak tree on the battlefield gave him pause. Father Montserrat had carried an invisible baby, possibly a Child of God. Wearing the Flog boxing gloves could attract attention and danger.
If the Great Mother perceived it and allowed the Child of God to breach the illusory-reality barrier to confront him, the consequences would be dire!
Moreover, Lumian suspected that heretics like Montserrat harbored evident psychological issues, making their mental states unpredictable. Playing the Symphony of Hatred directly could exploit this vulnerability, much like how he and Mr. K detested hearing others play the Symphony of Hatred.
Uncertain about which weakness might be triggered or the ensuing changes, Lumian planned to roll with the uncertainties.
Just as Lumian raised the Symphony of Hatred to his lips, an eerie chill crawled down his spine.
"Waaa!"
The spectral baby's cries reverberated, mere inches from him.
"Hehe, hehe."
The baby's cries morphed into laughter, as if engaged in an intriguing game with Lumian.
An inexplicable stiffness gripped Lumian, freezing him momentarily.
A cold aura infiltrated his body, spreading gradually to his abdomen.
As his life began to ebb away, merging with the cold aura, the baby in his ear oscillated between mournful wails and gleeful laughter.
Without hesitation, Lumian plunged his consciousness into his right hand, activating Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's residual brand.
A violent and frenzied aura erupted from Lumian, enlarging him without relying on his Compression strength. Tangible bloodlust filled the air.
The invisible baby's cries and laughter abruptly ceased, and the coldness invading Lumian's body dissipated under the searing sensation. The dark wilderness swayed, casting a faint glow.
Lumian, in control, terminated the activation and blew into the black bone flute with blood-colored holes.
A noticeably jubilant melody echoed, stunning Father Montserrat locked in battle with the Pride Armor.
His face twisted in indescribable agony.
Witnessing the silver armor wielding a staff of condensed light,

Father Montserrat instinctively reached out, pointing at the adversary's feet.
Countless vines, weeds, and tree branches sprouted rapidly, entwining the Pride Armor and impeding its movements.
Amidst the cacophony of crashing branches and tearing vines, the Pride Armor advanced laboriously, slowed by the entanglement.
Father Montserrat locked eyes with Lumian and, in a pained plea, shouted,
"Run!
"The Child of God can't be killed!"
Run? Wh... Lumian realized Father Montserrat seemed more grounded than before. The warmth in his gaze, the familiarity of home, replaced by agony and conflict.
"Run!
"Repent to Mother Earth on my behalf!"
Father Montserrat screamed in hysteria.
His naked form underwent an abnormal transformation. Organs, symbolic of creation and incubation, sprouted under the translucent, filthy white membrane, intertwining in a horrific display.
Repent to Mother Earth? Lumian vaguely understood Father Montserrat's current state.
His corruption appeared incomplete, retaining a side that clung to faith in Earth Mother, resulting in a split personality. Typically, the normal persona remained suppressed by the corrupted one.
Is this the problem that the Symphony of Hatred triggered, allowing Father Montserrat's normal personality to temporarily gain an advantage and regain control of his body? Lumian sighed, but this didn't prevent him from condensing crimson fireballs that were nearly white, launching them towards the mutated Father Montserrat.
Montserrat's countenance shifted between frigidity and anguish. His body alternated between evasion and restraint.
With all his might, he exclaimed, "The Child of God cannot be killed, only banished!"
As Father Montserrat spoke, the crimson fireballs, nearly white, exploded upon him. The silver-white Pride Armor breached the obstruction of vines and branches, charging forward with a light-conjured staff.
Rumble!
Upon the fireball's detonation, the fallen Father Montserrat wrested control of his body, attempting to retreat underground.
In that instant, Lumian materialized behind him, brandishing the black bone flute.

Lumian teleported into the explosion's epicenter, unconcerned about the potentially severe injuries from the formidable shockwave!
The fireball was a decoy. The true lethal strike he primed was the Symphony of Hatred!
Pfft!
Lumian thrust the black bone flute with blood-colored holes into Father Montserrat's diminishing neck.
Rumble!
The expanding flames engulfed them both.

Chapter 611: True Name

Rumble!

As Lumian's body was ripped apart by the explosion, he drew upon an Ascetic's tolerance for pain and a Pyromaniac's resistance to burning, activating the black mark on his right shoulder once again.

Alongside Father Montserrat, whose neck had been pierced by the Symphony of Hatred, he vanished into the swirling flames, reappearing at the edge of the dark wilderness.

His linen shirt, black vest, and dark pants lay in tatters. The exposed parts were mangled and charred, revealing white bones in some places.

Father Montserrat, close to death, had the filthy, translucent white membrane on his body torn and burned away by the explosion. The mutated naked body with various organs below was dented and charred, with flesh and blood constantly peeling off.

Snap.

As the first piece of flesh landed on the edge of the weed-covered darkness, it suddenly seeped in, as if absorbed by the soil.

Witnessing this, Lumian's heart stirred. He grabbed Father Montserrat's body and activated teleportation once again.

They left the dark wilderness and materialized on the deck bathed in crimson moonlight.

Simultaneously, the illusory oak tree in the depths of the cargo hold shed its bark, revealing moist, slippery flesh.

The blood-filled flesh began to squirm, but only a palm-sized figure emerged.

The figure, nearly the same size as the blob of flesh that had dropped from Father Montserrat and been absorbed by the wilderness, had clear eyes and a youthful appearance, resembling Father Montserrat, who had shrunk countless times.

Father Montserrat's eyes were glazed, and his expression was rigid, showing no signs of intelligence.

The silver-white Pride Armor rushed over and swung the re-condensed light hammer down, flattening the pixie-like Father Montserrat and turning him into a bloody pulp.

Dawn lit up, melting the meat paste quickly.

The illusory colossal oak tree instantly became more transparent, and the black wilderness with weeds rapidly disintegrated.

In the blink of an eye, the abnormal scene vanished. The cargo hold returned to its original state, but many wooden boxes had shattered, and the steel walls and floor bore obvious depressions and deep marks.

Elsewhere, Lumian drew the Symphony of Hatred's black bone flute and observed as Father Montserrat's blood dripped onto the steel deck without soaking in.
Just as he breathed a sigh of relief, he heard Father Montserrat, who had fallen to the ground and entered a dying state, weakly but persistently shout, "To banish the... Child of God... you must grasp... His true name!
"His true name is..."
Suddenly, Father Montserrat's voice vanished, but his mouth continued opening and closing.
The illusory, hollow cry of a baby echoed in Lumian's ears once more.
Unlike before, the cries were distant, as if in another world. Lumian's body didn't stiffen or turn cold, rendering him immobile.
Is the invisible Child of God still wary of the Blood Emperor's aura? *Is this instinctive fear?* Lumian quickly surveyed the surroundings and realized that the crimson moonlight on the deck, or rather, around him, had vanished.
The area became abnormally dark, preventing even the sound of seawater splashing.
"Waa! Waa! Waa!"
The baby's cries persisted, growing louder and clearer.
Lumian abruptly lowered his head, fixing his gaze on the breathless Father Montserrat and the stomach of the corpse before him.
At some indeterminate moment, the stomach bulged, as if something writhed within. Despite the already gaping wounds, a demonic blood-red glow emanated from the belly.
Lumian's eyes narrowed slightly as he knelt on one knee. Extending his right hand, which grasped the Symphony of Hatred, towards Father Montserrat's distended stomach.
Slash!
A gentle stroke of the black bone flute cleaved open the blood-red stomach, revealing blood-stained intestines and internal organs. There was no sign of the so-called Child of God or a moist, filthy baby.
Poof! A substantial amount of transparent, pale-yellow liquid spewed out from the ruptured blood-colored stomach, splattering the surrounding deck.
"Waa! Waa! Waa!"
The baby's cries intensified, piercing and shrill, drawing closer to Lumian.
He seemed to be gradually overcoming His fear of the Blood Emperor's aura out of anger and hatred.

I need to find a professional to banish this invisible Child of God... Lumian, whose current spirituality allowed him two uses of Spirit World Traversal, planned on seeking assistance.
Hunters weren't experts in such matters!
Yet, after activating the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian realized he couldn't sense the spirit world or the coordinates he had once held.
The abnormal darkness induced by the Child of God's cries appeared to seal off this area.
This was closer to Paramita!
I can't find help, summon a messenger, or pray to high-level existences... Lumian's eyes narrowed as his heart sank.
At that moment, the invisible Child of God's cries drew nearer, causing Lumian's body to stiffen and turn cold once again.
As panic surged, Lumian, a Conspirer, swiftly devised a new plan: Exorcism Spell!
One of the five ritualistic magics from Alms Monk, capable of dispelling wraiths and evil spirits.
The unborn Child of God, invisible in the real world, bore a resemblance to wraiths or evil spirits.
Lumian, untroubled by the need for a specific target in his Exorcism Spell, could firstly use his name. Secondly, he could pray to Mr. Fool. The proximity-based response of the seal on his chest, due to the severed connection with the outside world, would provide the necessary level and strength!
An Ascetic, Lumian could simplify parts of the Exorcism Spell for a quick completion.
The hitch was the requirement for the target's real name and an item frequently carried. Lumian lacked both.
His gaze shifted to Father Montserrat's open and deflated stomach, searching for something relevant.
If unsuccessful in a minute, he planned to unleash Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's aura, attempting to scare away the invisible Child of God and break through the abnormal darkness for an indirect banishment.
After scanning the area a few times, Lumian's gaze fixed on the chaotic, blood-stained intestines.
Amidst them lay a short, flesh-colored, bloodstained strip, clearly not fully developed.
Wh... An incomplete umbilical cord of the Child of God? If it's truly an umbilical cord, it's closely tied to the Child of God. Connected to His flesh and blood. I don't even need to know His true name to succeed in the Exorcism Spell... Lumian retracted the Symphony of Hatred and tore off the suspected incomplete umbilical cord.

The illusory baby's cries intensified.
Lumian shuddered and chuckled.
"Thank you for confirming it for me."
He held the incomplete umbilical cord and danced a rhythmic, distorted, primitive dance.
As Lumian danced, he constantly bent down, using the umbilical cord to draw corresponding symbols on the deck with Father Montserrat's blood.
He simplified the patterns he needed to complete, straightened his body, and pressed his left palm, creating a crimson, nearly white flame on the symbol.
Then, he placed the umbilical cord into the flames.
There was a strong symbolic meaning behind this, representing expulsion, incineration, and purification!
"Waaa!"
The baby's cries heightened, sending a shiver down Lumian's spine, causing his body to tremble slightly.
Swiftly, he positioned a lit candle atop the flame and umbilical cord. Stepping back, he recited in Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck..."
As the honorific name of Mr. Fool echoed, a wispy gray fog enveloped the surroundings. The unseen baby's cries diminished, echoing in a haunting hollowness.
Feeling a burning sensation in his left chest, Lumian advanced two steps with a determined expression. He grasped the smoldering umbilical cord, flicked it thrice, and returned it to its place.
He continued, "I beseech your assistance. I implore you to banish the object connected to this umbilical cord..."
In an instant, the crimson, nearly white, flames tainted the gray fog, burning more intensely. The umbilical cord swiftly charred, revealing Father Montserrat's transparent face marked by explosions and blood. The hollow baby's cries faded into the distance.
Father Montserrat's spirit involuntarily retreated, relief evident on his pained face.
He was also connected to the umbilical cord, and he was now a ghost!
With difficulty, Father Montserrat raised his hands and shouted, "Life's precious embrace, the harvest's grace!
"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"
His transparent Spirit Body rapidly dissipated into the darkness. The invisible Child of God emitted a shrill cry filled with hatred and curses.

The cry echoed in Lumian's head, making him feel as if he had endured Psychic Piercings repeatedly. He became extremely weak, his thoughts consumed by the pain in his soul, losing perception of the outside world.
Upon recovery, the abnormal darkness on the deck had vanished, and the crimson moonlight returned.
The symbols on the ground and the gray fog-colored flames disappeared, leaving only the quietly burning candle and the charred umbilical cord.
After a brief pause, Lumian bent down to extinguish the candle flame. Pressing his hand to his chest, he whispered, "Thank you, Mr. Fool."
After stowing away the remnants of the umbilical cord and the ritual candle, Lumian cast a glance at Father Montserrat's still uncharacteristic corpse. He unleashed his Compression power.
His spirituality restored, weakness eased, Lumian finally felt confident enough to return to the cargo hold. Silently, he packed the Pride Armor into his Traveler's Bag.
Completing this task, he changed into tattered clothes and tended to his exposed wounds briefly.
Enduring the pain, he returned to his suite as if nothing had occurred. Addressing the captain, Pedro, and the others, he declared, "The problem has been resolved. Father Montserrat's corpse is on the deck. His belongings will be handed over to the Church of Earth Mother. Right, a Blessed."
Lumian harbored no intention of claiming the Church of Earth Mother's items.
Captain Pedro and the others departed in bewilderment to verify the deck situation. Lugano approached Lumian and whispered,
"Is Father Montserrat really dead?"
"You can take a look at his corpse," Lumian replied with a "smile," intending to instruct the servant to provide treatment.
Lugano frowned and said, "But I vaguely heard his voice earlier. He seemed to be shouting the name of the so-called Child of God."
Shouting the so-called Child of God's name? Back then, Father Montserrat had indeed shouted the Child of God's true name, but due to special reasons, it hadn't reached the real world. Only Beyonders nearby corrupted by the Child of God could hear it?
Lumian pondered and said to Lugano, "That was before Father Montserrat's death. What name did he call out?"
Lugano heaved a sigh of relief and recalled, "I think it was... I think it was..."
Finally, he remembered and recited the pronunciation.
"Yes, Omebella."

Chapter 612: Daybreak

"Omebella."

Termiboros's resonant voice reverberated in Lumian's ears as He echoed Lugano's words.

"You've heard of that?" Lumian hadn't anticipated Termiboros, who had maintained silence for a considerable time, mentioning a name that left no impression on him.

"No, I've never heard of it before today." Lugano thought it was a question directed at him.

Termiboros fell silent, offering no response.

From the looks of it, it seems there is something off about the Child of God's true name... And it sounds like a woman's name. Considering the Villain pathway's progression to Sequence 5 Banshee, where they transition to women, and the inherent female inclination of the Earth pathway's Sequence 0, Earth Mother, along with the influence of the Great Mother Herself, it's quite plausible that the Child of God is a woman. It's a logical deduction... Lumian glanced at Lugano and smiled.

"It's fortunate you weren't aware of this earlier. Otherwise, you might have found yourself linked to the so-called Child of God."

As Lumian spoke, his attention shifted to Ludwig, who had silently moved to the living room's balcony. Lumian approached him at a measured pace, his gaze following Ludwig's toward the deck where Captain Pedro and others were examining Father Montserrat's lifeless form.

Lumian asked thoughtfully, "Is it edible?"

He meant whether Father Montserrat's corpse was edible.

While Lumian had abstained from claiming the Church of Earth Mother's possessions, including Father Montserrat's Beyonder characteristics, he hadn't committed to preserving the corpse intact.

In the heat of battle, it was customary for bodies to sustain damage!

Ludwig shook his head. "Not yet."

"Very well," Lumian sighed, retracting his gaze with a tinge of regret.

Thus, the mystery of Father Montserrat's inexplicable connection with the invisible Child of God remained unsolved. A peculiar umbilical cord had even taken root in his stomach, leaving Lumian unable to confirm if Prinpino was a byproduct refined from Father Montserrat's remains.

Indeed, Father Montserrat bore signs of severe corruption, though Lumian hadn't anticipated his corruption to rival that of Mad

Lady's.
Of course, it paled in comparison to the state of the Mad Lady's corpse; even Ludwig found it too dirty.
As for spirit channeling, Lumian understood that a spirit banished by the Exorcism Spell couldn't be summoned for a specific duration, rendering communication impossible. Once this period lapsed, spirit channeling became futile.
Upon returning to the living room, Lumian sank into a recliner, casually unbuttoning his black vest and linen shirt. Turning to Lugano, he remarked, "Come and treat me."
Lugano's eyes surveyed the makeshift bandages and the oozing wounds, expressing surprise.
"It's that serious?"
Lumian, with a hint of amusement, responded, "Do you think dealing with Father Montserrat is a walk in the park? If I hadn't taken risks, I might have been the one lying dead."
Lugano instinctively denied the suggestion, "Not what I meant. Why are your clothes and pants unscathed after such serious injuries?"
Lumian, enduring the pain, replied casually, "I obviously changed before coming back."
His Traveler's Bag proved invaluable, holding nearly a dozen identical shirts, vests, and pants, albeit varying in vest colors.
The only casualty was the golden straw hat, consumed in the explosion, now burnt to ashes.
However, this setback hardly fazed the great adventurer, Louis Berry, who had stocked up on identical replacements before leaving Port Farim.
This was the benefit of having a Traveler's Bag. Otherwise, how could he have the space to store so many useless items with just a suitcase?
Lugano, choosing not to pry further, focused on tending to his employer's injuries.
Originally considering a more intricate procedure, like cutting off charred skin, Lugano's plans were halted by Lumian, opting for a simpler approach.
Lumian had no intention of enduring the agony of anesthesia-free surgery, knowing that he would revert to his original state at 6 a.m.
With the pain and injuries now manageable and showing significant improvement, Lumian made his way back to his room. There, he unfolded a letter and began recounting the events involving Father Montserrat and the true name of the Child of God, diligently reporting to Madam Magician.

Lumian consistently regarded matters related to evil gods and the so-called Child of God with great gravity. He believed such concerns should be left to his superiors, acknowledging the importance of involving higher authorities.
Had Mr. K possessed a messenger, Lumian would have promptly dispatched a modified copy to inform the Aurora Order Oracle of the situation. The next course of action wasn't within the purview of an ordinary member like him or Minor Arcana; it was a concern for others to address.
Observing a shared stance between the Tarot Club and the Aurora Order in combating evil gods, especially those breaching the barrier, Lumian recognized his responsibility as both a minor Arcana card holder in the Tarot Club and an official member of the Aurora Order.
After meticulously recording the details, including Termiboros's reaction, Lumian summoned the "doll" messenger.
Engaged in a recent dispute with Ludwig and being in proximity to the other party, the "doll" messenger swiftly arrived and departed. It seldom lingered, avoiding casual conversations.
...
In a clean and refreshing bedroom of Loen Kingdom, Backlund, Madam Magician lay peacefully in bed, immersed in a restful slumber. Abruptly, she sat up, a puzzled expression crossing her face.
Spirituality warning?
Is something significant about to unfold?
Madam Magician, having just poured a glass of Sonia blood wine and not yet delved into her astromancy, was surprised to see the "doll" messenger materialize on her desk. It placed a folded letter next to a dark-red fountain pen.
Lumian's letter... Has he unearthed the issue with the Earth Mother Church's priest? I didn't guide him in vain... Madam Magician mused, letting the glass float in midair. She picked up the letter and unfolded it.
As she read, her expression underwent a sudden change, and she softly repeated the name,
"Omebella?"
The true name of the invisible Child of God is this? Was my spiritual warning connected to it?
This is something worth discussing at the Tarot Club's regular gathering...
After a moment, Madam Magician used astromancy to indirectly verify the information. She then seated herself and observed as the dark-red fountain pen levitated. Removing the cap, she began to

inscribe her thoughts on the faux goatskin: "Omebella is a name shrouded in the fog of history. It carries a potent symbolic meaning in mysticism..."

...

"Using Omebella as the Child of God's true name. I don't know if it's tied to the mysteries of the Second Epoch when the ancient gods, predating the Ancient Sun God, ruled the land, or if the Great Mother is employing intense mystical symbolism to gradually erode Earth Mother's authority and even Earth Mother Herself.

"If we can unravel the secrets of the ancient era, we might find an answer.

"The one the Aurora Order believes in might know something."

As Lumian read the response inked on faux goatskin, he sensed a subtle suggestion from Madam Magician, hinting at him to inquire with the Aurora Order through Mr. K.

He continued reading.

"Simply put, Omebella belongs to the ancient giant race. Once known as the Goddess of Harvest during the era when ancient gods held sway. I can't divulge more at this time. No need to delve into this matter specifically. If you come across the Earth Mother Church's Favored, Nightstalkers, or members of the School of God's Descent, keep a vigilant eye. We'll handle the follow-up. Of course, when the time comes, we might assign you one or two minor missions."

The Goddess of Harvest... indeed linked to the Earth pathway... Lumian pondered as he burned the letter with crimson flames. Returning to bed, he feigned sleep, attuned to the ship's movements.

With the sunrise, his body swiftly healed, and the day unfolded without unexpected incidents.

Lumian returned to the living room and addressed Lugano, who had been awake for an hour, showing signs of a restless night.

"Still hearing the baby crying?"

"No," Lugano replied, a mix of joy and uncertainty evident in his response.

Lugano believed he needed more time to observe before drawing a final conclusion.

Lumian chuckled.

"As expected, seeking Father Montserrat's help is the only way to completely resolve your aftereffects."

Lugano nearly choked on his words.

So, that's why you wanted me to seek help from Father Montserrat?

Killing him is the equivalent of completely resolving the

aftereffects I suffered?
Lumian approached the balcony and instructed Lugano, "Find Enio later and use a follow-up consultation as an excuse to confirm his condition."
Right, Enio was saved by Father Montserrat's surgery. Since there's something wrong with Father Montserrat, he, too, might be problematic... Lugano had concerns seeking the patient, fearing potential danger. However, as he observed the sunlight gradually brightening and the horizon turning red, a sense of relief washed over him.
At 9 a.m., Lugano returned, informing Lumian that the special patient had recovered exceptionally well. There were no signs of surgery failure or hidden dangers, nor indications of corruption.
Around the same time, Captain Pedro approached Lumian, sharing news that the ship would temporarily dock to allow the Church of Earth Mother's personnel to collect Father Montserrat's corpse and relics and remove relevant individuals.
Notably, the adventurer and his servant were explicitly excluded from this directive by the Church of Earth Mother.
Lumian smiled, offering no response to the captain's words. His demeanor radiated confidence and certainty.
Around noon, several combat nuns and a priest in a brown robe boarded the ship, escorting Enio and others away.
On the balcony, Lugano observed Enio being "invited" off the ship, his expression a mix of daze and fear, powerless to resist. Lugano sighed.
"If he's fine, why capture him?"
Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.
"Do you think it's nonexistent just because you say so? Be optimistic—after the Church of Earth Mother confirms there's no issue, he might secure a clerical position within the Church, interacting with combat nuns daily."
Lugano fell silent, then after a few seconds, he remarked, "But that also means losing his freedom. He's a victim..."
"Freedom?" Lumian scoffed. "The prerequisite for freedom is not endangering others."
Despite his stance, as he witnessed the terrified and nervous Enio and recalled the deceased Father Montserrat in his normal persona, Lumian couldn't help but recall a peculiar phrase his sister would occasionally utter: "All living beings suffer."
Ooo!
With a whistle, the ship prepared to set sail once again.

Chapter 613: New Commission

A few days later, Lumian lounged on a recliner on the suite's balcony, soaking in the sea breeze, reveling in the sunlight, and sipping an undiluted Manzan. From his Traveler's Bag, he retrieved the incomplete umbilical cord from Father Montserrat.

The cord was completely charred, stripped of its spirituality. After Lumian's repeated confirmations, backed by Franca and Jenna's divination, a conclusion was reached:

After the Exorcism Spell, the umbilical cord lost its vitality. Moreover, lacking Beyonder characteristics, it couldn't function as a mystical item or a main ingredient for charms, agents, weapons, or any other artifacts.

All it retained now was its distinct uniqueness.

In simpler terms, it mirrored the mark left on Lumian by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor. Devoid of power and incapable of emitting the fearsome aura of the Great Mother's Child of God, Lumian couldn't wield it to intimidate and temporarily intimidate a specific target.

Lumian surmised that it could only play a role in two scenarios.

Firstly, it could act as a casting ingredient, enabling specific spells to wield power beyond ordinary standards or aiding Warlocks in utilizing special spells beyond their usual repertoire.

Secondly, it could serve as a supplementary ingredient incorporated during the crafting of mystical items, charms, agents, or Beyonder weapons, imparting unique effects to the final product.

Naturally, Lumian also believed that such an umbilical cord fragment could prove valuable in the presence of the Great Mother's bestowed. For instance, even without Provocation, he could provoke intense animosity from those individuals.

Regrettably, Witches share similarities with Pyromaniacs. They are restricted to utilizing various black magic bestowed by potions, unable to delve into spell study and master new incantations like Warlocks. Among these black magics, only one, the Bloodline Curse, can be paired with an umbilical cord as a casting ingredient. However, the invisible Child of God has yet to manifest in the real world, rendering the curse ineffective against Him. Cursing the Great Mother is also off the table, as Franca and Jenna might find themselves with giving birth right there and then...

Yes, at the next meeting at the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society or any other mysticism gathering, I could aim to acquire a mystical item tied to a Warlock Sequence, then amass potent spells that employ umbilical cords or high-level items as casting

ingredients. Uh... isn't this creating several complications? In Aurore's terms, it's akin to raising a sheep for a plate of coarse salt—nurturing it only to be eventually slaughtered and roasted...

I've not needed to seek out an Artisan for crafting mystical items lately, and the absence of primary ingredients complicates matters. Alternatively, should I transform it into a Beyonder weapon with limited use?

This isn't ideal. There's a contamination risk if an insufficiently skilled Artisan incorporates it as a supplementary ingredient. It's not worthwhile enlisting the help of a high-level Artisan for what seems like a practically useless item...

What about fashioning charms and agents myself?

Lumian scrutinized the charred short umbilical cord for an extended period, grappling with indecision. Eventually, he returned it to his Traveler's Bag.

Then, Lumian reached into his pocket, where a finger from Mr. K sat.

In the past two days, he had undertaken a special "return" to Trier to brief Mr. K about Father Montserrat and the invisible Child of God. He received unreserved approval and praise from Mr. K.

The enthusiasm and fervor led Lumian to suspect that Mr. K might, in the next moment, sever his own arm and offer it to him.

His fingers seemed insufficient to convey the depth of his emotions!

Mr. K expressed great satisfaction with his decision to permit Lumian to leave Trier and pursue his adversaries. He perceived it as the Lord's revelation and commended Lumian's peculiar affinity for heretics and incidents involving evil gods, seeing him as a walking calamity for the fallen.

How could a Beyonder of such stature confine himself to Trier? It was imperative to explore various locations in the Northern and Southern Continents!

Regarding the name of the ancient Goddess of Harvest, Omebella, Mr. K didn't exhibit a notable reaction, nor did he seek an immediate revelation from his Lord. Lumian, failing to secure an answer, bid farewell and departed. Instead, he sought out Franca, Jenna, and Anthony to share the details of the surgical removal, human refinement, and Father Montserrat's near-conception of the Great Mother's Child of God as a man.

While Franca and Jenna were already acquainted with the Sowers of the Villain pathway, the connection with Father Montserrat left them feeling like they were hearing a horror story, traumatized by the bestowed of the Great Mother.

Anthony displayed no overt reaction, but he made a rare gesture.

Unconsciously, he gently stroked his stomach.
After conveying his sentiments, Lumian returned to the ship contentedly, resuming his journey to the southernmost part of the Feynapotter Kingdom.
Knock, knock, knock.
Lumian had just flipped through the Dutanese textbook for a few minutes when a series of knocks echoed on the suite's wooden door.
Lugano, ever diligent, played the role of a servant, making his way to the door and peering through the peephole.
In the past few days, the absence of baby cries had eased his anxious heart.
This incident only heightened his gratitude for choosing to stay with his employer rather than returning to Trier.
Lugano believed that if the issue stemmed from the Beyonder ingredients left behind by Tanko, even if he hadn't boarded this ship, he would have encountered a similar situation sooner or later. Moreover, the wait wouldn't be long — perhaps a year or even half a year. Without the aid of a powerful Beyonder like Lumian Lee, his fate would have been quite clear.
Spotting Captain Pedro outside, Lugano turned to Lumian, who was on the balcony, and informed him, "Boss, the captain is looking for you!"
Why would the captain seek me out? Shouldn't we tacitly overlook what happened? Lumian closed the Dutanese textbook and returned to the living room, bathed in bright sunlight.
Pedro, sporting a handsome brown beard, entered the suite and exchanged pleasantries. Clearing his throat, he said, "Mr. Berry, are you interested in taking on a commission? It's a straightforward one and won't consume much of your time."
Straightforward? I doubt it would remain so after being entrusted to me... After various experiences, he gained a better understanding of his unique constitution: As a Beyonder of the Hunter pathway, harboring an evil god's angel within him and concealed remnants of the Blood Emperor's aura, he naturally attracted calamities, prematurely unveiling problems that might have remained hidden.
Lumian couldn't foresee how a supposedly simple commission would unfold.
Seated in an armchair, Lumian smiled and responded, "What commission? I'll listen to the specifics before deciding whether to accept it."
Pedro sighed, beginning to explain, "The destination of this voyage is Port Colla, my hometown. My wife and children live there.

"At the start of the year, my beloved eldest daughter, Salah, fell in love with a young man. She was passionate and eager to marry him.
"As you're aware, in Feynapotter, marriage and family are held in high regard. We must approach marriage cautiously and maintain it responsibly. Blindly rushing into the cathedral isn't our way."
"Is that lad displeasing to you and your Matriarch? Are you hiring me to silence him?" Lumian teased. "Honestly, there's no need for such trouble. A captain like you surely has plenty of ways to handle inexperienced young people. For instance, give him an opportunity and entice him into the sea trade—only for him to never return."
Pedro chuckled dryly and responded, "I'm a law-abiding citizen. I won't resort to such measures."
A sea-faring captain with Beyonder abilities is a law-
abiding citizen? Spare me the humor... Lumian criticized, smiling at Pedro, prompting him to continue.
"I probed the young man and sensed something amiss. I hired adventurers to investigate him, but the two adventurers never returned," Pedro explained earnestly. "This raised my alarm. I don't want my child involved with such a person. It's too risky."
Lumian nodded slightly.
"Is that why you've sought me out?"
"Yes," Pedro admitted, forcing a smile. "To you, this may seem trivial, but it's of utmost importance to me. I'm willing to pay 20,000 gold risot as compensation. All spoils are yours."
20,000 gold risot. Being a captain seems quite lucrative... Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "Are you a Beyonder of the Planter or Apothecary pathway?
"Are there any Beyonders from these two pathways in your family?"
What kind of question is that... Pedro was taken aback.
"No."
"Why haven't you sought help from the Church?" Lumian inquired, posing a second question.
Pedro's expression darkened. After a brief silence, he sighed and replied, "As expected of an experienced adventurer.
"I didn't approach the Church because something is off with my daughter, Salah. Her infatuation with that young man is too intense, and she rejects reason. It's as if she's possessed by a demon. Seeking the Church could resolve the issue, but it might also lead to a negative encounter and outcome for Salah."
Lumian nodded thoughtfully.
"Do you suspect that Salah has been influenced or even possessed

by an unknown entity?"
"Yes," Pedro admitted, appearing worried.
Lumian asked a few more questions and took a moment to reflect before stating, "Alright, I accept this commission."
He had to consistently pursue opportunities and work towards digesting the Conspirer potion to a level where he could conduct an advancement ritual upon reaching West Balam in the Southern Continent.
Of course, saving up funds for Ludwig's meals was another motivation.
...
A few days later, at 10 p.m., in Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Trier.
Franca and Jenna glanced at Anthony, who had just knocked and entered, puzzled.
"Why are you here at this time of day?"
Anthony nodded. "I've found that woman."
Huh? Jenna was momentarily surprised before questioning, "The woman who appeared in the Magic Mirror Divination?"
The woman whose presence caused the Mirror World Fragment on me to tremble slightly?
Anthony affirmed with certainty, "Yes."

Chapter 614: Under-the-table Transaction

Delilah Le Roy, daughter of a gem merchant, already wed with offspring—a boy and girl—indulges in opera, theater, and literature. Despite the prior incident in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, she persists in her activities, easily located by my informant within a week... Not one for bodyguards, she ventures out with only her lady's maid and a valet in tow...

Seated in a window booth at a street café, Jenna mentally reviewed the compiled data, observing the refined lady with makeup befitting her stature disembark from her carriage and enter Trier's esteemed Avenue du Boulevard's Bonnie department store.

Jenna redirected her attention, acknowledging Anthony Reid seated diagonally across from her.

"That's her."

Franca, positioned on the same side as Jenna, deliberated before speaking, "The issue at hand... Is she baiting us? If her reaction was merely surprise without understanding, we might glean little of value. Should she persist in her high-profile activities despite the resonance with the Mirror World Fragment, it's plausible that she or the person behind her seeks to draw out the Mirror World Fragment's holder."

Having assessed the scenario, Franca concluded, "Engaging with Delilah recklessly poses significant risks."

"But our Magic Mirror Divination assures the safety of today's operation," Jenna countered.

Franca smiled in response.

"Place not undue faith in divination. Moreover, the danger may not be immediate. Hastily engaging with Delilah could disrupt our future leads."

"So, we stand by? Wait a month or two until tensions ease before acting?" Jenna pondered briefly, then sat upright, revealing her plan, "I have an idea!"

"What is it?" Franca inquired, intrigued.

Jenna pursed her lips and smiled.

"Employ the mystical item—Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction. It grants us a discreet opportunity to interact with Delilah unnoticed.

"This way, if the issue stems from the person behind Delilah, our contact remains concealed, preserving the trail of clues. And if Delilah herself is the concern, we can swiftly transition from contact to control."

Franca contemplated the proposal with gravity for a brief moment.

"It's not implausible... I'm actually interested in testing the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction myself. No need to contest it. I'm a Sequence higher than you, and my self-preservation capabilities surpass yours. Even if evil entities like demons seek a trade, I can invoke Madam Judgment, a formidable Arbiter, as my witness!"
The Demoness of Pleasure appeared eager to put the mystical item to the test.
Jenna remained silent for a few seconds before consenting, "Alright."
Anthony continued, "I'll handle the brief encounter. Using a Hypnotist ensures no lingering clues or traces for the person behind Delilah to discover."
"No issue." Franca dispensed with formalities, directing her gaze at Jenna, awaiting the retrieval of the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.
Dressed in grayish-white attire with brown leather armor, Jenna, like many female mercenaries, carried a leather brown backpack.
From the backpack, she retrieved a small, dark-painted wooden box adorned with a membrane curtain on each side, placing it on the table in the café's private room.
Franca weighed the terms of her request against the price of the Authority Holder's Bribe powers. Rolling up the sleeve of her lady's shirt, she reached through the membrane curtain on one side of the wooden box with a small cloth bag containing 100 Louis d'or in her right hand. Although the usage instructions didn't explicitly exclude banknotes, Franca, drawing on her extensive mystic experience, opted for gold coins, a more universally accepted form of currency.
In the next instant, she felt contact with wrinkled and moist skin, five fingers enclosing around the cloth bag containing the gold coins.
Suppressing a momentary surge of disgust, Franca articulated her request in Hermes.
"I desire an uninterrupted, unobserved, and highly discreet face-to-face encounter lasting over three minutes between my friend Anthony Reid, seated across from me, and Delilah, a member of the Le Roy gem merchant family in the nearby Bonnie department store."
Franca had included meticulous qualifiers, ensuring precision in the parties meeting and the manner of their encounter to avoid any distortion.
The object with the wrinkled and wet palm-like texture lifted the cloth bag containing the gold coins and withdrew.

This signified the agreement of the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.
Franca withdrew her right hand, using a white handkerchief to meticulously cleanse the touched area while expressing her discomfort with continuous spitting.
"Where should we position ourselves while waiting for the opportunity to meet?" Anthony inquired.
Franca stowed away her handkerchief, offering a smile.
"The request specified only two individuals: yourself and Delilah Le Roy. Consequently, your best chance is to shadow her until the opportunity arises."
"Fair enough..."
At this juncture, Franca retrieved the resplendent Seven-Stone Bracelet from her Traveler's Bag, extending it towards Anthony.
"In case of any complications, teleport away immediately."
Observing the seriousness in the Demoness of Pleasure's demeanor, Anthony swallowed his inclination to politely refuse and accepted the Seven-Stone Bracelet.
After a moment of contemplation, Franca suggested, "If you place trust in me, I can craft a Paper Figurine Substitute using your blood and hair."
Anthony remained silent for a few seconds before agreeing, "Okay."
...
Within the confines of the Bonnie department store, Anthony swiftly pinpointed Delilah Le Roy, exercising his keen observation skills as a Hypnotist.
Delilah stood amidst the first floor, accompanied by her lady's maid and the valet, engrossed in a magician's performance held by the department store to elevate the ambiance.
In the midst of the spectacle, the magician's assistant wheeled in a substantial wooden box capable of accommodating three to four individuals. The magician, with a theatrical flourish, removed his top hat and made an announcement.
"For my next act, I require the assistance of two fortunate members of the audience.
"Madame, would you do me the honor of joining me on stage?"
The magician's invitation was directed at Delilah Le Roy.
Though hesitant, Delilah couldn't muster a refusal and reluctantly ascended the wooden stage prepared for the magical performance.
A weak personality and a difficulty in declining others... Perhaps influenced by the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction...
Anthony vaguely anticipated the nature of the intended meeting as he observed Delilah's demeanor. With a calculated step forward, he drew the attention of the magician.

"This gentleman, please join us on stage as well."
Feigning reluctance, Anthony awkwardly made his way up onto the stage.
The magician gestured toward the wooden box, instructing, "Please take a seat inside."
Pursing her lips, Delilah sighed and, urged by the crowd, entered the wooden box.
Choosing a seat the furthest from her, Anthony, while there was still illumination, offered a smile and remarked, "Truth be told, I feel a bit embarrassed too."
His words were delivered with a calm and genial tone, causing Delilah's tense demeanor to ease.
Anthony continued, "Don't believe me? Look me in the eye."
He pointed to his eyes, inviting her gaze.
Delilah instinctively turned her gaze toward a pair of dark brown eyes reflecting her figure.
My figure... Delilah was caught off guard as her gaze seemed to descend into a spiraling depth.
In that moment, the magician closed the wooden box, enveloping it in darkness.
Seizing the opportune moment, Anthony posed a question, "Did you experience anything unusual in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra a week ago?"
"Yes," Delilah responded truthfully, sensing a trustworthy demeanor.
"What was that sensation?" Anthony inquired as the magician recited his rehearsed lines.
"My heart started racing, and my blood felt like it was boiling," Delilah recounted her experience.
"Do you know what that means?" Anthony probed further.
In the darkness, Delilah shook her head.
"I'm not sure, but my real father instructed me to inform him immediately if I had similar sensations."
"Real father?" Anthony had a hunch.
Delilah chuckled self-deprecatingly, explaining, "My real father, my mother's lover, and the current government's Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny."
Moran Avigny... Sensing the magician's maneuvers with the wooden box, Anthony swiftly posed a final question. "What did he say upon learning about your reaction?"
"He told me not to worry and to continue living as usual," Delilah admitted, still harboring some concerns.
Anthony acknowledged her words succinctly.
"Lovely lady, I'm thrilled to share this magic moment with you.

Can you provide me with something memorable? Perhaps a few strands of your hair."
His voice, deep and captivating, made Delilah feel that the request was entirely normal.
Consequently, she plucked a few strands of hair and handed them to Anthony.
Upon touching the hair, Anthony sighed in relief and continued in a resonant voice, "I don't want this to jeopardize your family. Once you step out of this wooden box and hear my snap, you'll forget our interaction here..."
As his compelling voice echoed, Delilah's thoughts blurred.
Smack!
The wooden box opened, revealing only Anthony. Delilah, on the other hand, had been gracefully pulled from behind the stage by the magician.
The audience erupted in excited applause.
Once the ovation died down, the magician, hand pressed to his chest, bowed in gratitude. Without casting a glance at Delilah, Anthony snapped his fingers.
Intent on engaging in conversation with the man who had established a connection with her, Delilah was jolted when she heard the snap. Her body shuddered slightly, her eyes momentarily glazed over before regaining awareness.
Turning on her heel, she descended the wooden platform, returning to her place between the lady's maid and valet.
Meanwhile, Anthony departed at a measured pace, seamlessly blending into the crowd.
...
In Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.
Franca applied the ashes of Delilah's hair onto the surface of the makeup mirror using black flames, reciting the familiar incantation for the Magic Mirror Divination.
Amidst the splashing water and the dark luster, Franca posed the question, "Is the owner of this hair a Mirror Person?"
The aged voice responded, "No."

Chapter 615: Descendants

Based on Anthony's feedback, Franca had long suspected that Delilah wasn't a Mirror Person but had some connection to them. Otherwise, she wouldn't have reacted abnormally without knowing anything.

She raised the question during Magic Mirror Divination to ensure Delilah hadn't made preparations in advance or been hypnotized.

After a moment of contemplation, Franca posed her second question.

"Is the owner of this hair a descendant of the Tamara family?"

Amidst the splashing water in the dim mirror, an aged voice replied, "No."

Not a descendant of the Tamara family... Franca used the elimination method and chose a pre-prepared question.

"Is the owner of this hair a descendant of Mirror People?"

The aged voice replied in a calm and hoarse tone, "Yes."

Yes... Franca and Jenna were both shocked and delighted.

Though they had similar suspicions, confirming it stunned and terrified them.

How long had the Mirror People infiltrated Trier? Why did they have descendants in their thirties?

Moreover, they could marry, have children, and have descendants like ordinary people...

Aside from believing in the mirror's Primordial Demoness, who had a more extreme personality and naturally harbored resentment towards Her counterpart outside the mirror, what was the essential difference between them and ordinary people?

Franca and the others weren't sure if most Mirror People dissipated after death, leaving behind fragments of the mirror world, or if only a few special Mirror People like Mirror Gardner were like this.

Combined with Delilah's biological father, the current Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, instructing her to pay attention to abnormal reactions, Franca concluded that the high-ranking official had been replaced by a Mirror Person many years ago.

"According to the information gathered, the municipal modifications in Underground Trier, particularly the catacombs, were implemented to address the leakage of the Fourth Epoch Trier's seal. Mirror People had already replaced the originals by then, making it reasonable for them to inhabit Trier," Anthony said after some thought. "The problem now is that Mirror People can actually have descendants normally."

Jenna's eyes flickered as she interjected, "One more thing. Did a

descendant of the Tamara family bring the Mirror World Fragment into the tomb in recent decades? Or was it a special Mirror Person searching for something and ended up perishing in there?
"Or could it be that before Fourth Epoch Trier sank underground or was sealed, Mirror People were already active on this land?"
Franca hissed and said, "Your latter conjecture is a little terrifying.
"Our original deduction was that the special Mirror World stemmed from the War of the Four Emperors, which caused Fourth Epoch Trier to sink. It was closely related to the Primordial Demoness's divine descent, Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's counterattack before death, and the demise of the Demoness of Catastrophe, Krismona. However, if Mirror People had appeared in Fourth Epoch Trier before all of that, the root cause of the problem would be even more mysterious and terrifying."
Fear of the unknown.
Franca couldn't help but gaze at the makeup mirror in her hand and address the dark mirror, "Am I a descendant of Mirror People?"
She didn't expect an answer, knowing that Magic Mirror Divination usually allowed only three questions at most. She merely voiced her thoughts and was concluding the divination.
The mirror fell silent for a few seconds before resuming, "Your ancestor had nothing to do with Trier."
Oh, does that mean I can't be related to the Mirror People? Wait a moment... Franca's surprise reverberated in her voice. Then, a sudden realization struck her. "So, you're not an emotionless answering machine. You don't have to strictly adhere to the corresponding rules."
The darkness on the mirror's surface swiftly dissipated, and the aged voice ceased.
Franca was left speechless.
Jenna drew closer to Anthony, her words a hushed murmur, "Did you catch the helplessness in that answer?"
Anthony cast a subtle glance at Franca and nodded imperceptibly.
"Hey! Don't whisper in front of me. I can hear you!" Franca complained, her Assassin's keen senses picking up their conversation.
She swiftly shifted the topic, "Fortunately, it said no. If it was a yes, it would be terrifying.
"Hmm... Your grandfather or great-grandfather shouldn't be Trieriens, right?"
"I'm not even a Trierien myself," Anthony replied.
Jenna tersely acknowledged.
"The generation of my father's and mother's grandfathers came to Trier."

Franca breathed a sigh of relief, stating, "Now, the direction of the investigation is clear. The current Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny!"
She pondered whether to conduct a covert investigation to gather crucial information or to promptly inform 007 and let the Eternal Blazing Sun Church handle it. Opting for the latter meant potential constraints due to confidentiality principles, limiting her access to the specific details she could seek from 007.
...
Ooo!
Amidst a whistle, a ship steered into Port Colla on the southernmost coastline of the Feynapotter Kingdom.
It was already mid-November, and Trier was gripped by a cold winter. Although Port Santa demanded thick clothing due to plummeting temperatures, Port Colla retained a warm climate. Passersby adorned themselves in fancy short-sleeved shirts and loose pants, exposing their ankles.
Unlike Port Santa, Port Colla lacked the tradition of carrying sabers or swords, but Lumian, drawing from her knowledge, knew that the people here were still rambunctious, with large-
scale armed conflicts being commonplace.
Port Colla differed significantly from Port Santa, which thrived on pastures, plains, and mountain range mines. With limited arable land and scarce pastures, the inhabitants originally depended on the sea for their livelihood.
Over generations, the Church of Earth Mother's advancements in land development, seed cultivation, and livestock breeding transformed Port Colla. While the region achieved a level of self-sufficiency in food production, the rambunctious folk customs endured.
Nevertheless, Port Colla continued to be a major importer of food, serving as one of the primary trade hubs between the Feynapotter Kingdom and the Southern Continent. The bustling port hosted numerous foreigners and stood as a key base for the Harvest Fleet.
Captain Pedro, standing beside Lumian, observed the lively port scene.
"It's the dry season, so the weather isn't as hot, and there's not much rain. It's the most comfortable period in Port Colla. You're welcome to visit."
These words, spoken out of courtesy, hung in the air.
Lumian, leaning against the shipboard, directed his gaze toward the distant sea, shrouded in what seemed like dark clouds.
"Is that the Berserk Sea?"
The Berserk Sea divided the Northern and Southern Continents.

Only when Emperor Roselle found a safe sea route could the Northern Continent's countries cross the sea and reach the Southern Continent.
Pedro nodded, a hint of solemnity in his voice. "That's right. Without a captain and sailors familiar with those waters, a ship will undoubtedly be swallowed by the ever-changing and violent weather there. Shipwrecks occur around Port Colla every year, claiming lives."
When the majority of the passengers disembarked, Lumian guided Ludwig and Lugano to Captain Pedro's residence.
He intended to assess the situation of his eldest daughter, Salah, and her lover before deciding on his next course of action.
Carrying a suitcase and holding Ludwig's hand, Lugano trailed closely behind his employer.
It wasn't until they left the dock that he realized something startling.
His employer and the captain were conversing in Highlander!
Since departing from Port Santa, his employer and most of the ship's occupants had been using Highlander for communication.
When did he learn Highlander? How had he become proficient in it?
As Lugano observed his employer's retreating figure, he fell into a thoughtful silence, absorbing the relatively fluent Highlander being spoken.
Port Colla, 7 White Shark Street, Pedro's house.
A five-story building with a green front lawn and a charming garden in the rear, it was home to nearly thirty people under Pedro's mother's care.
Passing through the iron gates, Lumian spotted a couple strolling arm in arm on the lawn.
They were both very young. The woman, in her early twenties, possessed brown hair, brown eyes, and a naturally fair, now-tanned complexion. Although her appearance was remarkable, Lumian, accustomed to interacting with Demonesses and having a beautiful sister, deemed her merely decent.
The man, in his mid-twenties, had ordinary features, single eyelids, and curly brown hair. Clad in a white shirt and dark-gray pants, he had very average looks and demeanors that would be lost in a crowd.
"Salah, let me introduce you. This is the great adventurer, Louis Berry. His legendary experiences will soon reach Colla," Pedro joyfully introduced Lumian without a trace of gloominess.
Salah, sporting a fishnet hat to shield herself from the sun, approached with curiosity,
"What kind of legendary experiences?"

"Does earning 300,000 gold risot from a commission count?" Pedro replied, representing Lumian with a smile.
"300,000 gold risot?" Salah exclaimed.
This was a huge fortune for most people in Feynapotter.
Lumian observed the father-daughter interaction with a smile. In his peripheral vision, he detected a darkening expression on Salah's lover, a clear sign of displeasure.
Jealousy, vigilance, and worry? If there's truly something amiss with him, he should be more confident... Lumian mused, unfazed.
Pedro then introduced Salah's lover.
"Flores, Salah's fiancé. They met in Feynapotter City."
Feynapotter City, nestled in the highlands, stood as the capital of the Feynapotter Kingdom. Salah had encountered Flores there during her university studies, though Flores hailed from an ordinary family with modest educational qualifications. Having completed only elementary grammar school, he later established a grocery store near Highlander University.
"Greetings," Lumian nodded slightly, exuding the self-assured air of a great adventurer.
Following the welcoming banquet, Flores departed from Pedro's house.
He ventured into his favorite romantic bar, settling at the counter with a discontented expression.
While casually surveying the surroundings, he couldn't help but notice a woman seated two or three spots away.
Her flaxen-colored hair was elegantly tied up, and her lake-colored eyes held a crystalline glimmer. With a high nose bridge and rosy lips, even her side profile was breathtakingly beautiful.

Chapter 616: "Love"

For a moment, Flores found himself captivated by her presence. He couldn't resist leaning in to compliment her straightforwardly, a habit common among male Feynapotterians.

"Today is my lucky day to encounter such a beautiful lady. Could I be luckier to buy you a drink?"

The woman's eyes flickered, and a smile graced her lips. She gently shook her head, indicating that his offer wasn't accepted.

Undeterred, Flores wanted to say more, but he noticed the woman's expression cooling off, prompting him to retreat to his seat.

In the following moments, he alternated between stealing glances at the woman's figure, clad in a simple shirt and slender black pants, and observing the rim of her glass, watching it touched by her moist red lips.

Flores's body heated up, and his mouth grew dry. The more beer he drank, the harder it became to quench his thirst.

Eventually, the woman finished her light-gold Manzan, placed the tall glass on the bar counter, and gracefully left amid the soothing and elegant music.

Flores hurriedly approached, pulling out a soft tissue that had gained popularity in recent years. He wiped the edge of the wine glass, where the woman's lips had just touched.

Then, he folded the tissue, meticulously scanning the surroundings of the bar stool. He collected a few flaxen-colored long hairs, securing them in the tissue.

Completing this task, Flores became aware of the bartender and the nearly twenty male customers around him, all staring with a shared judgmental gaze: "Pervert!"

Flores wasn't the sole victim of the woman's enchantment—it extended to all the men and a few women in the bar. All of them had witnessed his perverted actions.

Despite the accusatory stares, Flores kept his composure and left as if nothing had transpired.

He vowed never to return to this bar again!

Yet, he harbored no regret for his actions.

On the way back to the apartment, Flores's heart pulsed with anticipation, fueled by the promise of gains. His pace quickened, though practicality dictated a more measured speed.

Upon reaching his residence, he drew the curtains and retrieved an old notebook with a yellowed cover from his suitcase compartment.

Inside, a mottled note held a complex vocabulary that didn't belong

to any language from the Northern Continent, accompanied by numerous instructions in Highlander.
Flores eagerly placed the tissue containing the woman's hair and saliva on the notebook. He then took up the mottled note, reciting the intricate and peculiar words with marked pronunciation.
"Naboredisley..."
This was the love incantation Flores had chanced upon.
With the true name, date of birth, closely related items, or bodily fluids like flesh and blood, he could insert the medium in his notebook and recite the incantation seven times, compelling the target to fall irrevocably in love.
Flores had patiently waited for the opportune moment to orchestrate Pedro's daughter, Salah, to fall and be injured. His timely aid had not only garnered gratitude but also facilitated the collection of her blood, fulfilling the conditions for the love incantation.
Reality had validated the enchanting power of the love incantation!
Flores refrained from using it again, uncertain of how to dispel its effects. If pursued by multiple women before his marriage to Salah, provoking a conflict among them could jeopardize his standing within the large family and hinder access to resources and support.
However, today was different.
She was the most captivating woman he had ever encountered. He was ready to pay any price to make her his own!
Uncertainty lingered in Flores's mind about whether the saliva-stained tissue and the naturally fallen hair could truly serve as a medium for the love incantation, but the desire to find out overwhelmed any reservations.
Excitement and anticipation surged within him as he envisioned the possibility of witnessing such a beautiful scene, an uncontrollable smile gracing his face.
"Naboredisley..."
Flores continued reciting the love incantation with abnormal devotion and enthusiasm, his heart pulsating with desire and joy.
"Naboredisley!"
After repeating it seven times, Flores watched in amazement as the tissue and hair burst into flames, reflecting a rainbow before swiftly turning to ashes.
Success... Success! Flores couldn't initially believe it, but immense joy struck his heart.
Surprise lingered, but Flores cared little.
What mattered was that it worked!

That captivating woman is now in love with me!
Thoughts of what would unfold next raced through Flores's mind. He hastily closed the notebook, clipped the note, and dashed to the door without bothering to put them away.
He yearned to walk the streets, confident that the lovely person must be seeking him!
As Flores swung the door open, there she was—the woman from the bar, standing outside.
Flores's entire being went slack under the lake-colored crystalline gaze, his balance teetering on the edge of surrender. Every fiber of his being yearned to yield.
As the woman willingly stepped into Flores's embrace, he eagerly enveloped her in his arms, leaning in for a kiss.
Yet, the sensation he encountered was far from the warmth and softness he had imagined. Instead, it was cold and unyielding.
Wh... Flores's surprise turned to shock as he realized he was embracing a waist-high mirror. The mirror brushed against his chest, swaying back and forth, resisting his attempts to disengage.
Flores recoiled in unnatural fear. The lingering sensations from his earlier fantasies refused to dissipate. His heart froze while his body burned.
With mounting dread, he struck the mirror with increasing force.
Finally, retreating to his suitcase, Flores delivered a decisive blow, shattering the mirror with a resounding crack.
It shattered into countless fragments, piercing Flores's clothes, chest, stomach, and arms.
Agony surged through Flores's body, searing his senses, snapping the fraying nerve that was already on the brink.
In that moment, he tasted a euphoria unlike any other.
Collapsing to the ground, Flores lay motionless, caught between fear, longing, anguish, and ecstasy.
...
"It can truly assist in digesting the Pleasure potion..." Franca clicked her tongue, observing the scene unfold in the mirror of the apartment diagonally opposite Flores's room.
With her expertise, the spectacle before her could be deemed a novelty.
"I assured you I wouldn't deceive you," Lumian, sporting a golden straw hat, responded with a grin.
Upon accepting the commission and identifying Flores's primary problem of inexplicably garnering the fervent affection of a stunning girl, Lumian's initial instinct was to deploy a Demoness to test this individual.
Franca's saliva and hair served as part of the investigation. After

all, mysticism likely played a role.
Naturally, for safety precautions, Franca had treated the saliva and hair beforehand. Thus, she devised a Mirror Substitution, a dark magic of Witches, which accurately connected to them.
Now, the results were in—splendid. Franca had subjected Flores to pleasure's torment, exposing him to the agony of chasing fleeting satisfaction.
"Curious, Flores managed to ensnare my mirror's affection with just a single-word incantation. No ritual or supplication to any entity," Franca mused with emotion. "Even I can't achieve that."
Lumian chuckled in response, remarking, "You can. No incantation or medium needed. Just unleash your charm."
"..." Franca was taken aback. "You're starting to resemble an Intisian. Or is this a result of your Feynapotter education?"
Pursing her lips, her gaze flickered.
Lumian continued, "There's another issue. Pedro previously tasked two adventurers with probing Flores, but they vanished. And it appears this fellow lacks Beyonder powers."
Franca suddenly smiled. "This is intriguing... If the Mirror Substitution failed, and I fell under the sway of that incantation, falling in love with Flores, what would you do?"
Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.
"Making someone vanish without a trace is simple. I don't even need to lift a finger."
Lumian was confident Ludwig could consume the fellow entirely, with counter-divination to top it off.
Without awaiting Franca's response, Lumian headed for the door.
"I'll pay that fellow a visit. Keep vigilant for any developments and beware of mishaps."
"Understood," Franca replied solemnly.
As Flores hadn't managed to close the door in time, Lumian found the entrance accessible without the need to pry it open.
Sensing the intrusion, Flores snapped out of his daze, hastily rising to his feet.
By this point, Lumian had already picked up the notebook, unfolding it to the two pages displaying the mottled note.
"W-what are you doing?" Flores asked, horror etched across his face.
He immediately recognized Lumian.
Louis Berry? The great adventurer Louis Berry?
"Did Pedro hire you to investigate me?"
Ignoring the inquiry, Lumian walked toward the window, ushering in a gust of fresh air.
"A love incantation can make a woman fall in love with you. All

you need is to obtain her true name..." Lumian began reciting the Highlander annotation on the mottled note in front of Flores. "The incantation's pronunciation is..."
He abruptly halted without completing the recitation.
Flores's face had already turned a sickly grayish-white, as if he could foresee the impending demise of his reputation and his capture by the Church.
"Where did this come from?" Lumian pointed at the mottled note and the old notebook.
Cold sweat broke out on Flores's forehead, and his eyes gradually turned fierce.
Suddenly, he shouted, pronouncing the word in a rugged and awkward tone, "Naboredisley!"
This time, there was no target or corresponding medium.
Almost simultaneously, Lumian sensed his surroundings fall silent as an ominous aura rapidly enveloped the room.

Chapter 617: Transaction

Flores's demeanor suddenly shifted, his expression turning icy, and a malevolent smile curling upon his lips. His aura underwent a dramatic transformation.

He raised his gaze, Lumian's dark hair and green eyes reflecting in his now ominous stare.

Lumian's suppressed emotions, desires, and the haze surrounding him erupted like a volcano.

This was a force even an Ascetic's endurance couldn't withstand.

Crack!

Lumian's body cracked, shrinking into a palm-sized mirror.

The mirror shattered completely, fragments scattering across the ground.

In the room diagonally opposite, Lumian materialized beside Franca, wearing a solemn expression.

Had he not prepared Mirror Substitution beforehand, he might have endured a double explosion of emotions and desires. It resembled the same outcome when evil god bestowed heard the Symphony of Hatred's different melodies.

Of course, if Franca hadn't been lurking nearby, if he hadn't readied Mirror Substitution, he wouldn't have used himself as bait to "converse" with Flores.

Lumian seized Franca's shoulder, his voice deep as he uttered, "Let's leave this place first."

He promptly activated the black mark on his right shoulder, in an attempt to teleport away.

Confronted with an adversary capable of exploiting his weaknesses and latent dangers, Lumian's initial response was to switch to support, utilizing his corresponding abilities from a distance. Franca would assume the role of the main attacker. However, considering Franca, a Demoness of Pleasure, hadn't indulged herself for a long time, he feared she might not resist the explosion of desire. It seemed prudent to retreat, regroup with others, and return later.

At that moment, a voice alternating between masculinity and femininity echoed in Lumian and Franca's ears.

"There's no rush to escape. I've changed my mind. I want to make a deal with you."

A deal? Something jolted in Lumian's and Franca's minds. After some thought, they chose to stay put.

Simultaneously, Lumian sank his consciousness into his right hand, ready to activate the remnant aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor.

This wasn't meant to intimidate Flores, but if his emotions and desires were triggered again, Lumian could "alert the police" in time!

Being one of the Feynapotter Kingdom's primary ports for trade with the Southern Continent and a key base for the Harvest Fleet, Port Colla undoubtedly housed at least one Grade 1 Sealed Artifact even without a demigod.

Franca gazed at the wall and the air in front of her, questioning, "What deal?"

Flores, dressed in a floral shirt, casually pushed open the unlatched door of the apartment and spoke in a deep, cold, and dignified manner,

"Let me introduce myself. Naboredisley, a Demon."

A Demon? A genuine Demon... The cost of using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction actually materialized here--to make a deal with a Demon... However, Lumian's acceptance of the captain's mission and our pursuit of Delilah are distinct matters. If we had opted to patiently wait a month or two before engaging with Delilah instead of utilizing the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, what would have transpired today? *Could there have been a so-called deal?* Franca smiled in surprise, suspicion, and confusion.

"How can you reveal yourself as a Demon?

"Shouldn't a true Demon conceal their identity to lower our guard?"

The Demon, identifying himself as Naboredisley, clenched his right fist and pressed it against his lips. He smiled and replied, "A true Demon is both Demon in body and mind. I'll inform you that you're dealing with a Demon, but refusal isn't an option. I won't obscure my identity to achieve my goals like the foolish ones.

"For instance, this man named Flores is well aware of the consequences of repeatedly reciting my true name through the notebook. Heh heh, back then, that foolish Warlock labeled it the Love Incantation, but he still couldn't resist the temptation and couldn't control himself. Haha, for Demons, this gradually decaying soul that slowly descends into the Abyss is the most delectable feast. The sensation of resistance and constant decay is as unforgettable as the finest wine."

Lumian and Franca didn't disdain or ridicule Naboredisley's unabashed and alluring depravity.

Since a Demon had spoken, there had to be a deeper motive!

Moreover, Lumian couldn't be certain if Naboredisley was a genuine Demon or a self-proclaimed one. He couldn't verify if Naboredisley was his actual name or if he had a different origin.

Although the activation of desire aligned with the traits of a

Sequence 5 Desire Apostle of the Demon pathway, it wasn't exclusive to Demons. Lumian's Symphony of Hatred could achieve a similar effect.
Franca grinned at the Demon's incessant narrative and remarked, "That foolish Warlock probably assumed your true name as a Love Incantation because of your cues. Is that really your true name?"
"That's why he's foolish," Naboredisley replied with a faint smile.
Lumian wasn't eager to rush into the transaction. Instead, he inquired, "How did you manage to convince Flores that the Love Incantation actually works?"
Naboredisley casually glanced back at Flores's rented apartment and assumed a relaxed posture.
"He tried some other incantations from the notebook, and some of them worked."
"He's just an ordinary person, yet he can cast an incantation like a Warlock?" Franca expressed disbelief.
Naboredisley grinned.
"I've heard a very reasonable saying: 'All things possess godhood.'
"No matter how ordinary a person is, as long as they're willing to pay the corresponding price, they can create Beyonder effects."
All things possess godhood... Mr. K often says this when preaching... Lumian observed Naboredisley, the self-proclaimed Demon.
Franca seized the opportunity to ask, "What price did Flores pay?"
Naboredisley smiled meaningfully. "I already told you."
The part where the soul gradually decays and falls into the Abyss? Franca nodded thoughtfully.
Lumian suddenly grinned.
"If he hadn't paid the price, how could you communicate with us so easily using his body?"
Naboredisley smiled back but remained silent.
Lumian shifted the topic.
"Did you have a hand in the deaths of those two adventurers who were investigating Flores?"
"Consider it a bit of interest," Naboredisley replied, glancing around. He smiled and pulled a chair over, casually remarking, "You lack the necessary courtesy."
"Because we never considered making a deal with you," Franca deliberately stated. "I won't make a deal with a Demon."
Naboredisley chuckled and said, "Although it's amusing for a Demoness to claim she won't trade with a Demon, I can assure you that I won't force you into a deal. I won't even hinder you from informing the Church of Earth Mother about Flores later.
"I differ from my inept peers. I prefer transparent trade, avoiding

the convoluted legalese of contracts where terms and conditions are twisted. I'll make you choose to trade with me, even knowing the content and price."
"I decline," Franca replied with a smile. "I refuse to entertain your deal."
Naboredisley narrowed his eyes dangerously but maintained his usual amiable demeanor.
"You can listen first before deciding if you want to accept this deal.
"I won't boast that I can fulfill any of your wishes, but I can help you fulfill most of them. This is a promise from an ancient Demon."
"Ancient?" Lumian looked curious. "Have you heard of the Ancient Sun God?"
Naboredisley's expression darkened subtly.
"I'm aware."
"Can you tell me about Him? The deity I believe in now seems to be the resurrected Him." Lumian's lips curled up, revealing two rows of pearly-white teeth. "This can be used as compensation for the transaction, but it has to be paid first before we fulfill the contract. Don't think of fabricating it. That would be blasphemy to my Lord."
Naboredisley fell silent. After a few seconds, he smiled and said, "As I mentioned earlier, I can't accomplish certain things and fulfill certain wishes. This is one of them."
When one's humble enough, it's really difficult to win a war of words... Lumian sighed inwardly and turned to Franca, silently inquiring if she wanted to seize this opportunity to the-table Transaction.
Franca hesitated for a moment before addressing Naboredisley. "Tell me about the deal first before I decide."
Naboredisley chuckled.
"A wise decision. I hope you can help me kill another Demon's descendant. He resides somewhere in the Berserk Sea. Don't worry, Demon descendants are cold, cruel, and bloodthirsty. He definitely meets the death penalty standard in your hearts."
"Then why don't you do it yourself?" Franca clicked her tongue. "You seem quite powerful."
Is it because you're sealed? Or could it be that he can't leave the Abyss and can only project himself onto a human like now, unable to maintain it for long?
Naboredisley replied calmly, "Any abnormal movements from me will attract the attention of the other Demon. The reward for this transaction is that I fulfill one of your wishes. It's a predetermined wish that I can fulfill."
"Can you help us digest the potion in our bodies?" Lumian probed.

Naboredisley shook his head.
"I won't lie to you. I can't do it. The digestion of the potion is a personal matter.
"Of course, I can create conditions and opportunities to indirectly help you digest the potion as soon as possible, but whether you can seize those opportunities depends on yourselves."
Quite honest... Franca muttered silently.
Suddenly, she revealed a bright smile.
"This deal tempts me, but I need a reliable and powerful witness."
Author's Note: The inspiration for the love incantation in the originated from the real world. I believe I've shared it on my public WeChat account before—Aphrodite's hidden name is Nepherieri, meaning "beautiful eyes." Repeating this incantation can win a woman's love. When I read about this, I found it a little sinister. I mainly changed the pronunciation.

Chapter 618: Divination Ritual

Franca's request met with a gentle shake of Naboredisley's head.
"You can request the deity you believe in to bear witness when signing the contract, but I don't want anyone else present."
A chuckle escaped Naboredisley's lips.
"I'm a Demon. I need to be careful to avoid becoming prey."
We can recite a god's name as a witness when signing the contract? The temptation loomed over them both.
For ordinary Beyonders who held faith in the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery, invoking a deity's name as a witness might offer no more than psychological comfort. True gods rarely intervened in such trivial affairs of ordinary Beyonders without a proper ritual.
Yet, as Minor Arcana card holders of the Tarot Club, Lumian and Franca followed the great existence, Mr. Fool. Simply invoking his name could draw attention, a fact not lost on them.
Franca's heart raced with uncertainty. Should she strike a deal with the Demon under the watchful gaze of Mr. Fool, in exchange for elusive benefits?
Naboredisley reiterated his stance.
"This is a fair transaction. There's no coercion. It's the same for you and me. If you insist that there must be a powerful witness present, I choose to give up."
Just as Lumian contemplated the idea, Termiboros's resounding voice echoed within his mind, "It's best if you don't agree. Don't even make a false promise."
Lumian found himself taken aback as Termiboros, an Angel of Inevitability, unexpectedly warned him about the unfolding situation.
Alarmed, Lumian pushed aside thoughts of Termiboros's possible intentions, choosing instead to focus on scrutinizing Naboredisley's every move and assessing his own mental state.
The more Lumian delved into the matter, the more alarmed he became. Initially planning to teleport away immediately and seek help, he and Franca had gradually shifted their stance, considering Naboredisley's propositions and exploring potential exploitations. Their plan had evolved from seeking the presence of a powerful Arbiter like Madam Judgment as a witness to contemplating a deal without one. Now, all they hoped was to ensure their safety by invoking a god's name.
Compromising one step at a time, changing bit by bit... This is very similar to Naboredisley's description of degenerating bit by bit, slowly rotting one's soul before ultimately plunging into the

Abyss... It also said that Demons aren't just about the body but also about the mind... Lumian swiftly snapped out of his reverie, sensing a possible influence from Naboredisley on both himself and Franca. It resembled the signs of a Spectator's presence. Similarly, he could glean insights through Anthony's self-examination technique.

Even in this state, Franca displayed remarkable control over her emotions. She turned to Lumian, seeking agreement. With thoughts racing, the corners of Lumian's mouth curled up slightly as he addressed Naboredisley.

"We don't require a witness, but I need to confirm something first."

"What is it?" Naboredisley's demeanor remained cold, yet his attitude was composed.

Lumian nodded at Franca, conveying that he would handle the situation.

Franca, in turn, silently acknowledged her understanding.

Turning back to Naboredisley, Lumian stated, "I need to verify that the name you're using now, the name you'll use in the contract later, is indeed your real name."

Deliberately avoiding the term "Naboredisley," Lumian exercised caution to mitigate potential risks.

Naboredisley pondered for a moment before responding, "Sure. As a Demon, I don't just dislike but also admire your caution."

Lumian maintained his smirk.

"The way to confirm is Magic Mirror Divination, a complete one. We'll set up a ritual and seek answers from a hidden entity. As you know, my friend is a Demoness. She's quite skilled at this."

Lumian pointed at Franca as he spoke.

Indeed... we should confirm if Naboredisley is the Demon's real name. Otherwise, the deal would be a joke... Franca suddenly became alert, realizing she had been too eager to conclude the deal and had overlooked many potentially problematic details.

Naboredisley pondered for a moment before agreeing, "Alright, but I have to observe from within the wall of spirituality where the ritual takes place.

"This is a Demon's caution. We're worried that you'll use Magic Mirror Divination to inform certain Demons' natural enemies."

"No problem," Lumian said with a bright smile. "To complete Magic Mirror Divination, I want you to write your real name on this note and bring over the ancient notebook from the opposite room. Together, they can act as a medium for divination."

Naboredisley, well-versed in the intricacies of complete Magic Mirror Divination, responded with a smile, "No problem."

He stood up, taking the note from Lumian's hand. Using Flores's

fountain pen, he inscribed a complex word with the pronunciation "Naboredisley," its language unknown.
The self-proclaimed Demon then left for Flores's rented apartment, retrieving the ancient notebook and the note.
Lumian had already arranged a simple ritual, placing three candles and a mirror on an empty table.
Before Naboredisley returned, Franca approached him and whispered, "The usual Magic Mirror Divination target?"
Lumian shook his head, indicating they weren't. Softly uttering a single word, he said, "Him."
A pure male pronoun.
Franca's pupils dilated as she tacitly understood whom Lumian was referring to.
The implications were self-evident!
After Naboredisley handed her the ancient notebook, Franca smiled happily and said, "Demons are likely higher-level godhood creatures. I can't afford to be negligent. I plan to seek answers from a more special entity. Inevitably, my companion will need to assist me during the ritual. I hope you can understand what you'll see next. If you're unwilling, we'll abandon this transaction."
She didn't make it sound too firm, making the "abandon the transaction" option seem more like a negotiating strategy.
Naboredisley smiled and replied, "No problem. I've seen too many special rituals."
His implication was clear—if there was a problem with your ritual, I would be able to tell immediately.
Franca sanctified the ritual silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality. Lumian placed the ancient notebook and the note with the real name in front of the lit candle and mirror, using a small amount of Gardner Martin's spiritual blood to draw a few complicated and strange symbols.
Observing from a distance, Naboredisley muttered, "Seeking guidance from fate... Questioning an entity in this domain?"
Lumian seized the opportunity to turn around and ask, "What can I do to dispel Salah's infatuation with Flores?"
Naboredisley smiled meaningfully and said, "Either they both perish, or they seek my approval."
With the preparations complete, Franca stepped back, gazing at the three burning candles and the palm-sized makeup mirror. She recited an honorific name in ancient Hermes.
"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era..."
Upon hearing this, Naboredisley's expression changed.
His face turned icy, and his eyes revealed a chilling cruelty.
Just as he was about to project Lumian and Franca's figures in his

eyes and ignite their desires and emotions, he realized that a thin gray fog emanated, making the two targets indistinct and challenging to lock onto.
Lumian gripped Franca's forearm.
In mysticism, this signified that the two people in the ritual were one.
Of course, the prerequisite was that the original ritual host didn't resist.
Lumian took over the ritual host's position and recited the last two paragraphs.
"The mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck..."
The thick gray fog surged even more visibly, and Naboredisley, manipulating Flores's body, grew increasingly malevolent.
He tried to break free from the altar, attempting to shatter the wall of spirituality, but the gray fog stood as an impenetrable obstacle.
Lumian advanced two steps, presenting the note with the real name to the candle symbolizing the ritual's host. He ignited it and flicked it three times, dispersing ashes onto the ancient notebook.
After these preparations, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "I beseech your assistance. I implore you to banish the creature named Naboredisley..."
Naboredisley, in control of Flores's body, opened his mouth, emitting a sharp cry.
Simultaneously, filth, depravity, and evil ravings echoed in Lumian and Franca's ears. Each word seemed to assault their minds, causing their bodies to contort and their souls to decay.
Yet, under the ritual's shield and the layers of gray fog, the words appeared distant, as if emanating from the horizon. Even if Lumian and Franca strained to listen, the specifics eluded them.
Amidst a faint shriek, pitch-black gas emanated from Flores's body, swiftly dissipating.
Faces emerged from the pitch-black gas, mouths opening and closing, cursing Lumian and Franca vehemently, only to dissolve into the gray fog.
In a matter of seconds, the pitch-black gas completely vanished, and Flores's demeanor and aura returned to normal.
Exorcism Spell!
In just a few days, Lumian had employed the Exorcism Spell once more!
From his perspective, Naboredisley, hiding his true form somewhere, had stealthily infiltrated Flores's breath for control. He was akin to a Wraith evil spirit possessing another.
Most surprising was the effectiveness of the name Naboredisley!

Of course, if this wasn't the true name, if the Exorcism Spell proved futile, Lumian could resort to Mr. Fool's complete honorific name to intimidate the Demon and drive it away with the gray fog and the gaze of a great existence.

This time, it wasn't Mr. Fool's seal on his chest that answered, but the great existence himself!

Lumian forced a smile and said to Franca, "This fellow is less formidable than the invisible Child of God of the Great Mother."

Despite Naboredisley's frenzied curse affecting his desires and emotions, requiring him to endure with his Ascetic powers, it still paled in comparison to the invisible Child of God's ability to partially breach the gray fog's protection of the ritual host, repeatedly creating a Psychic Piercing effect.

Franca remained silent, her gaze fixed on the makeup mirror serving as decoration.

In the mirror, a faint fog permeated the air, and a vague figure approached from a distance.

Chapter 619: Chronicles

Franca strained her eyes, attempting to discern the figure amidst the dimly lit surroundings. The tall buildings loomed mysteriously, their outlines blending with the fog, reminiscent of stars reflecting on a foggy night.

In the distance, lights flickered, accompanied by indistinct honking sounds.

Wh... Franca's pupils dilated, and her eyes widened in astonishment.

Her heart, previously gripped by the effects of Naboredisley's frenzied curse, now surged with shock.

Instinctively, she focused all her might on the figure, trying to pierce through the layers of gray fog and unravel its face and clothing. However, the thin fog grew hazier, dissipating along with the fleeting images it carried.

In just three to four seconds, the mirror on the altar reverted to its normal state.

"What's wrong?" Lumian turned to Flores, who lingered in the residual gray fog, seeking an update on Franca's condition.

Franca, still captivated by the mirror, fell silent for a moment before speaking.

"Did you see the scene reflected in the mirror?"

"I did." Lumian reflected briefly and suggested, "Perhaps it signifies Mr. Fool's divine kingdom."

Their prayers for the Exorcism Spell had been directed towards Mr. Fool. Therefore, the mirror used to deceive Naboredisley while being ineffective in actuality was likely related to Mr. Fool.

Franca stammered, "B-but the backdrop resembles the city before your sister and I transmigrated. It's like those foggy times—every building morphing into colossal creatures nestled in the fog, adorned with countless glowing eyes."

Lumian, understanding Franca's emotions, showed no surprise at the familiar street scenes.

Reminding his companion, he said, "Don't forget about the Celestial Worthy. He has a close connection to your homeland, and he and Mr. Fool have been engaged in a dream battle. It's quite conceivable that such dreamscapes can manifest in reality through rituals."

Franca fell into a momentary silence before releasing a sigh.

"You're right..."

She followed with a self-deprecating laugh.

"I got worked up for nothing."

Lumian mitigated the negative effects from Naboredisley and

methodically extinguished the candle flames, concluding the ritual.
As Franca dispelled the wall of spirituality and the wind howled, clearing away the lingering gray fog, Flores seemed to snap back to reality, no longer lost in the confusion of searching for an exit.
However, upon seeing Lumian and Franca, his face turned an even more pallid shade.
Just as he was about to plead for mercy, a sharp pain shot through Flores's body.
Instinctively, he lowered his head and observed a black, almost ethereal, filthy liquid oozing from his body. Highly corrosive, it swiftly dissolved his blood, flesh, and bones.
"No!
"Save me!
"Save me!"
Flores unleashed a blood-curdling scream, repeatedly calling for help. Lumian, however, observed with interest, as though studying the toll exacted on those who made a deal with Demons.
In less than ten seconds, Flores's body succumbed to corrosion, collapsing with a resounding crash, immersed in the almost illusory black liquid.
Flores's head continued to wail, his voice gradually fading.
After a while, he breathed his last with wide-open eyes.
His relatively intact head swiftly disintegrated into the filthy liquid.
The once-illusory liquid lost its evil, mystical aura, revealing the remains of the corpse, now filled with a foul, noxious mud-like substance.
"Dealing with Demons doesn't end well.." Franca sighed, reflecting on her earlier temptation.
Her laughter echoed hollowly as she continued, "Thankfully, we didn't strike a deal with that self-proclaimed ancient Demon. Still, I missed an opportunity to eliminate the latent threat of using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction."
Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Consider this carefully.
"I remember Madam Magician's usage instructions, emphasizing the possibility of encountering transactions with evil entities like Demons.
"Recall, it was about encountering a transaction, not completing one.
"You've faced it; you simply chose not to accept it. That fellow didn't force you either."
Franca contemplated the situation and admitted, "You make a point. It does seem that way..."

She clicked her tongue and glanced at Lumian.
"If you had chosen the Lawyer path, you might be equally promising...
"In reality, I believe that's the norm. The Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction is, at most, equivalent to a Sequence 5. Every use means one less opportunity. How could the negative effects be a transaction with a Demon? From what I know, Demon is a High Sequence term within the Criminal path. What does it signify? It represents a demigod!
"Yes, it's merely encountering a transaction, not completing it. There's room for negotiation. Yet, it's also highly dangerous. Demons and other evil entities aren't known for their philanthropy. If we refuse to trade with them, why would they spare us indefinitely? Furthermore, predicting when we'll encounter them is impossible, making it challenging to prepare in advance."
Lumian smiled.
"If you can't predict it, try approaching it differently. After using the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction, immediately prepare and take the initiative to create an opportunity to negotiate with Demons and other evil creatures. Set the pace and manage the risks. For instance, 'invite' Demons to Saint Vièvе Cathedral for a deal."
The Eternal Blazing Sun Church's main cathedral in Trier, Saint Vièvе Cathedral!
Franca chuckled.
"Demons aren't brainless zombies. Why would they willingly walk into Saint Vièvе Cathedral to meet their doom..."
Franca suddenly halted.
Saint Vièvе Cathedral might not be suitable, but they did have a few hidden locations with a similar atmosphere. It wasn't entirely impossible.
For example, the sacrificial square on the third level of the catacombs, Krismona Night Pillar...
"That's an interesting idea," Franca commended Lumian. "In the past, when facing the negative effects of mystical items, we always endured and waited passively. Taking the initiative is a different approach. Hunters indeed have their own unique styles."
Taking the initiative involved making preparations in advance and minimizing potential dangers.
Of course, taking the initiative didn't necessarily mean triggering the effects, but it required considering such possibilities.
Lumian glanced out the window.
"Flores's scream has likely attracted the attention of the nearby

residents. Someone may have called the police. Let's vacate this place before examining the contents of this notebook."
He gathered the ancient notebook, candles, and other items from the dining table as he spoke.
"Agreed." Franca surveyed the room, and dark flames silently ignited in various spots.
As the flames flickered, Lumian teleported Franca away, returning to the guest room of Captain Pedro's five-story house.
"Go through the notebook and check if there's a way to dispel the love incantation. I'll verify Salah's condition and inform Pedro about Flores's situation and outcome. He can handle the Church of Earth Mother and liaise with the local police." Lumian handed the ancient notebook to Franca before opening the door and stepping into the corridor.
Franca settled into the recliner and opened the notebook.
Suddenly, she murmured to herself, Something feels off. Knowing Lumian's approach, shouldn't he have immediately perused the notebook after the ritual, searching for a solution to dispel the love incantation? Why did he hastily leave the moment the police were mentioned after discussing matters with me extensively?
He should be aware of the critical issue...
As these thoughts raced through her mind, Franca suddenly came to a moment of realization.
Naboredisley's chilling rants and wild curses had a disturbing impact on Lumian, stirring up his desires and emotions. Despite his attempts to endure the onslaught using his Ascetic powers, subtle signs of struggle manifested.
Franca's eyes darted around, a sly chuckle escaping her lips.
...
Lumian found Pedro in the small living room on the first floor.
Before he could delve into Flores's situation, the captain exclaimed in surprise,
"Mr. Berry, Salah came to me a few minutes ago. She was crying in fear and pain, saying she dreamt of falling in love with Flores and couldn't wake up. However, she suddenly woke up tonight, feeling like it was a nightmare, and she wishes to annul the engagement.
"May I know how you did it?"
Pedro spoke with a touch of unconscious politeness.
She's back to normal? *Could it be because Flores is dead?* No, more likely Naboredisley's expulsion through the Exorcism Spell has restored those affected by the devil to normal... Lumian guessed, smiling.
"Flores is already dead."
"Did you kill him?" Pedro, showing no aversion to the idea of

killing, was even more intrigued by the fact that Flores's death seemed to have awakened his daughter.
"A Demon killed him." Lumian briefly recounted the events, avoiding mentioning Naboredisley by name. Instead, he handed Pedro the love incantation note tucked into an ancient notebook for a closer look.
Finally, he said, "You handle the rest. It's advisable to keep Salah in a cathedral or cloister for the next month or two. I'm uncertain if the Demon will revisit the former victim once he recovers."
"Understood." Pedro clenched his teeth, his expression somber.
After receiving the 20,000 gold risot bounty, Lumian returned to his guest room.
Franca, holding the ancient notebook, frowned as she said, "This doesn't seem like the notebook of an evil Warlock. It's more like a collection of a novelty hunter's chronicles. It contains various legends of Devils and Demons from the Northern and Southern Continents spanning the past thousand years. The last record appears to be over a hundred years ago.
"Mmm... There are peculiar incantations scattered within, as if fabricated.
"One of them mentions a legend of a Demon on Hanth Island in the Berserk Sea."
Lumian grasped Franca's concern.
Naboredisley had mentioned that the Demon descendant he sought to eliminate resided somewhere in the Berserk Sea!

Chapter 620: Abnormality in the Abyss

"Could it be that some of the Demon legends in this notebook are true?" Lumian held the yellowed notebook and flipped through a few pages.

Franca tersely acknowledged and said, "In a world where superpowers exist, where true Devils and Demons roam, many related legends must be true or have originated from the true prototype. Do you think Nabo—uh, the Demon who claimed to be ancient, might be the protagonist of one of these legends? And the Demon on Hanth Island is its archenemy, living in the real world disguised as a human. It lied, claiming the other party is a descendant of a Demon and tempted us into taking risks to achieve a certain goal?"

"Perhaps," Lumian smiled. "Let's not speculate about such matters involving high-level creatures. I'll just write to Madam Magician and report it to her."

Franca glanced at Lumian and chuckled.

"You're really proficient in dealing with management.

"However, it does make sense. We know very little about real Demons. Making wild guesses is a waste of time."

She then pointed at the notebook and said, "The handwriting differs from the note that wrote the Love Incantation. It's not the same author."

Lumian had already sat at his desk, unfolded a piece of paper, and wrote to Madam Magician. As he deliberated over his words, he responded to Franca's words, "Does the notebook have the phrase that represents the Love Incantation?"

"I scanned through it. Nothing," Franca replied affirmatively.

Lumian contemplated for a moment and said, "There are two possibilities. The first is that the Demon used someone under its control to insert the Love Incantation into this notebook that records Devil and Demon legends, hoping that it could secretly spread and affect more people. The second possibility is that those who once read this notebook were unknowingly influenced by the demon and obtained a so-called revelation. They wrote this Love Incantation and provided commentary."

"Mysticism sure is dangerous..." Franca sighed with emotion.

Lumian swiftly composed the letter and dispatched the ancient notebook and the note with the Love Incantation to Madam Magician.

While awaiting a response, Franca and Lumian briefly delved into the Demon legend of Hanth Island in the Berserk Sea.

Thirty years after Emperor Roselle discovered a safe sea route to

the Southern Continent, numerous mysterious deaths of colonists and natives plagued the newly colonized Hanth Island. Witnesses claimed to have seen a valley ablaze with sulfur flames in the island's forest. At night, pitch-black Demons with goat horns were suspected of circling the area.
After the authorities intervened, the mysterious deaths ceased. The owner of the notebook that chronicled the legend even attempted to explore the forest, but he failed to locate the alleged valley burning with sulfur flames.
As they conversed, time passed. The doll messenger arrived with Madam Magician's reply, the ancient notebook, and the Love Incantation note.
Lumian illuminated the gas wall lamp and began reading. Franca didn't hesitate and leaned in.
"It's impossible to determine its true name with just the fact that the name 'Naboredisley' could expel that fellow.
"This is because it admitted, in a short period of time, that it was its real name. Even if it's lying, sometimes, under certain circumstances, admitting something makes it the truth. It possesses the corresponding mysticism connection. This is one of Mr. Fool's authorities. Amon, too, could do it in the past.
"As you prayed directly to Mr. Fool and used his power to exorcize Naboredisley, it doesn't matter if it's its real name. It won't affect the final outcome.
"Do you understand? Termiboros's warning was correct. You have to be cautious even if it's a false promise.
"If it's truly a Demon and its true name is indeed Naboredisley, the problem ends up more complicated. Since the Fifth Epoch, Demons active in the human world have either taken the form of Sealed Artifacts or come from Andariel, Beria, or Nois. Demons without surnames in their true names are often ancient or come from the Abyss where Devils and Demons reside. As for the Abyss's current state, Emperor Roselle's diary has mentions of it."
Upon reading this, Lumian turned to Franca.
In the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, he often observed others trading Emperor Roselle's diary. When the April Fool's members were still active, they would even recite the relatively comedic parts publicly. However, having joined the transmigrator organization only recently, he had no interaction with translations from the past. He had no way of knowing what Abyss-related matters the Emperor had recorded.
Franca said with a solemn expression, "Emperor Roselle once found the entrance to the Abyss and conducted a thorough exploration."

"As expected of Emperor Roselle," Lumian praised instinctively and sincerely.
There weren't many people he admired—in fact, very few—but Emperor Roselle was one of them.
Knowing that this emperor was a transmigrator like his sister made him feel an affinity with him.
Franca continued, "In the Abyss that Emperor Roselle explored, Devils and Demons had long perished. Not a single one remained.
"All he saw before him were either corpses or silence.
"This state made him feel fear. He left in a hurry without completing his exploration."
"All dead?" Lumian frowned slightly. "Is the Love Incantation fellow either not a Demon or an ancient Demon from the Abyss's core?"
Pausing momentarily, he added, "If it's really an ancient Demon, it might know why the Abyss underwent such an abnormality."
Franca nodded solemnly.
The duo cast their gazes at the back of Madam Magician's reply.
"I reckon you've already grasped the gist of the Abyss from the Two of Cups, so I won't dive deeper. Simply put, Naboredisley could be a potent Demon who slipped out of the Abyss's anomaly, or it might have roamed the Northern Continent before the three major Devil clans—Nois, Beria, and Andariel—held sway. It didn't pledge allegiance to any ancient gods, whichever way you slice it. But dealing with an ancient Devil King who's fled back to the Abyss isn't something the two of you are capable of, let alone striking a bargain with it.
"You can explore the Demon legends on Hanth Island if it's on your route, but stay cautious.
"Remember, the Abyss's corruption is potent. It can corrupt people without their awareness. During this time, be vigilant for changes in your thoughts, concepts, emotions, and desires. If you notice anything unusual, consult a Psychiatrist for confirmation. If you're genuinely affected by the Abyss aura from Naboredisley, contact me or Judgment. Experts skilled in purifying such influences will assist you. Avoid burdening Mr. Fool unnecessarily.
"Thinking about the name 'Naboredisley' is okay, but refrain from writing or reading it."
After reading the letter, Lumian mumbled to himself, "Madam Magician seems more inclined to believe it's a Demon and not some other hidden entity."
"That's right," Franca echoed, puzzled. "Let's assume that fellow is a Demon, yet it doesn't even have Danger Premonition, allowing us to complete the preparations for the Exorcism Spell. If we say it isn't, it can create fluctuations and trigger our desires and

emotions. I was just guessing that it's a secret entity that possesses a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact of the Demon pathway."
Lumian pondered for a few seconds and said, "Perhaps Madam Magician has seen more.
"That fellow probably doesn't have Danger Premonition because its true form isn't here. It only descended with a sliver of its aura and power. Or perhaps, the danger originated from Mr. Fool, so it couldn't sense it!"
"That makes sense," Franca agreed before saying with a strange expression, "Ever since we became Minor Arcana cards, we've increasingly come into contact with the depths of the mystic world. The Demoness Sect, the mirror world, the War of the Four Emperors, the Great Mother, and a Demon of the Abyss this time... In the past, when I read Emperor Roselle's diary, I often had the feeling that 'that's just how the world is.' But now, the contents of his diary have truly come to us."
Without waiting for Lumian to speak, Franca added in a self-deprecating manner, "For example, a Demoness does taste pretty good."
Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Think about it carefully. Did you encounter these things after becoming a Minor Arcana card holder, or after getting to know me?"
"Uh..." Franca's lips twitched. "You know yourself well."
...
Two days later, Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano boarded a long-distance ship set to pass by Hanth Island, en route to the Southern Continent's West Balam.
Lumian aimed to investigate the Demon's legend and seize an opportunity to fully digest the Conspirer potion.
After outsmarting Naboredisley and banishing it with the Exorcism Spell, Lumian realized that his potion digestion had made significant progress.
With another decent performance, he could advance the digestion further. This would eliminate the need for the final advancement ritual's aid, allowing him to plan the subsequent matters more calmly.
Captain Pedro, accompanied by his eldest daughter Salah, and a few Favored and Blessed, expressed sincere gratitude to Lumian. They watched as he ascended the gangway with his godson and servant, boarding the ship named 'Berries.'
Once the ship set sail, one of the Blessed appeared to sigh in relief and commented, "He's finally left Port Colla..."
Without waiting for Salah to inquire about the reason for the sigh, the Blessed, wearing a brown priest's robe, turned to her and Pedro

and advised,
"The circumstances at the scene of Flores's death indicate that this matter involved a true, high-ranking Demon. Miss Salah, it's best if you stay in the cloister for a year to avoid any possible aftereffects."
Salah, aware of her awakening thanks to the adventurer Louis Berry's assistance, was horrified. However, lacking personal experience, she inquired, "A year? A real Demon... What kind of Demon is that?"
The Blessed, in a brown clergyman's attire, responded solemnly, "It's the Demons from the legends you've heard of, or something even more powerful."
"Wh..." Salah turned to her father with a face filled with fear, confusion, and disbelief.
Did you guys save me from such a Demon?
Pedro was equally surprised.
He had never imagined that his daughter's situation would involve such a terrifying existence.
And Louis Berry had only received 20,000 gold risot!
No, he actually succeeded!
Pedro, having witnessed the adventurer Louis Berry's strength through the colossal wave he created, could now grasp his power more vividly in this direct comparison.
...
In the first-class cabin suite aboard the Berries.
Lumian handed the ancient notebook and the note with Love Incantation to Ludwig and asked with a smile, "Is it edible?"

Chapter 621: Hanth Island

Ludwig, savoring succulent roasted lamb chops, cast a quick glance at the ancient notebook and the note containing the Love Incantation.

"I can only provide details about the paper's age, the raw materials, and the manufacturing process."

The knowledge and concealed content inscribed on it couldn't be extracted.

"Alright." Lumian withdrew his hand, his disappointment minimal.

He had approached Ludwig with the intention that it didn't harm asking.

Finding nothing else of interest, he settled into the recliner, immersing himself in the warm sunlight. Flipping through the ancient notebook filled with Demon legends,

Lumian found it composed entirely in Highlander. Flores, having only attended elementary grammar school, wouldn't have comprehended it otherwise.

Reading with enthusiasm, as if engrossed in a gripping novel, Lumian discovered that certain legends surpassed even the thrill of contemporary horror stories, sending shivers down his spine.

Occasionally, incantations emerged, some fabricated by the ignorant and subjected to numerous alterations. Others carried a subtle malevolence, bearing a resemblance to Naboredisley. Lumian refrained from uttering them aloud, silently reciting them instead.

The first day of the Berries' voyage unfolded in tranquil serenity.

Late at night, Lumian dreamt of enchanting scenes, weaving into blush-inducing stories that heightened his emotions.

Suddenly, Lumian awoke. Sunlight filtered through the window curtains, casting a faint glow.

It was 6 a.m.

Lying in bed, Lumian experienced a sense of loss.

He lacked the endurance of an Ascetic in dreams, causing certain scenes to be unusually poignant.

Phew... Lumian exhaled, emitting a self-deprecating laugh. Almost forgot, this isn't a boon; it's a curse.

Reverting to a physical state when Termiboros was newly sealed at 6 a.m. every morning brought benefits like fearlessness of serious injuries, no heed of energy consumption, and automatic healing.

Though thoughts of Cordu's catastrophe and his sister Aurore haunted him with each reset, the initial pain gradually dulled, becoming a bearable numbness after his psychiatric treatment.

Occasionally, he felt a dull ache and emptiness.
Lumian rose from bed and drew open the curtains, revealing two contrasting scenes of the azure sea.
To the right, a crimson sun had just surfaced on the horizon. To the left, fog lingered, and waves surged, shrouding the situation 100 meters away.
Exiting the master bedroom, Lumian noticed that Lugano was already awake, captivated by the seascape.
"You're in a good mood," Lumian teased.
Lugano grinned sheepishly and replied, "It's my first time in the Berserk Sea. I'm a little excited and woke up early."
He added, "Besides, if I want to be your interpreter, I have to master Dutanese as soon as possible."
On the coffee table in the room lay numerous Dutanese books recently purchased by Lumian from Port Colla. Being a primary trading port for the Southern Continent, Port Colla's citizens had a practical need to learn Dutanese, resulting in a trend. Lumian easily acquired two sets of teaching materials covering elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels, along with practice materials, thanks to various teaching aids and Dutanese instructors. This was a stark contrast to Port Santa, where obtaining a few barely usable books required considerable effort.
Lumian applauded gently.
"Not bad."
Lugano pointed towards the foggy sea and explained, "Last night, I heard from a sailor on the ship that many vessels attempted to explore the sea in that direction, but they never returned. Occasionally, people would spot one of those ships quietly passing by at night with no lights or anyone on the deck.
"They say it's the Berserk Sea. Stick to the safe sea route; attempting unknown routes often leads to unknown and irresistible danger.
"See, the sun is rising over there, right? The sea seems calm, but venture beyond the safe route, and we might face a sudden hurricane, a lightning storm, or even get melted by the sun and evaporated. These are tales from sailors; I'm not sure if they're true."
Lumian nodded and suggested, "Look into more similar rumors."
With his employer's approval, Lugano's expression brightened, finding a purpose in his work.
The voyage through the Berserk Sea proved relatively uneventful. Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano managed to avoid causing any disruptions.
Occasionally, they witnessed storms capable of city-wide

destruction or forest-like lightning. Sometimes, they noticed the absence of fish throughout the entire sea, creating an eerie silence akin to the legendary Underworld.
Guided by the seasoned captain, first mate, and sailors, the Berries navigated through these regions along the safe sea route.
After a few days, the ocean-venturing steamship reached Hanth Island, the transit port. The crew replenished coal and water, conducted machine maintenance, restocked light beer, and replenished various food supplies over two days.
"There doesn't seem to be any specialties on this island," Lugano remarked, consulting the travel guide from Port Colla. "But due to its strategic geographical location and natural deepwater port, it's one of the main transit ports controlled by the Feynapotter Kingdom."
Specialties? Does that include Demons? Lumian critiqued silently, producing two gold risots and twirling them in his hand.
"I'm going to try the local self-brewed wine."
He made his way to the port's largest bar and ordered a glass of thick, pomegranate-colored local red wine, Paha.
Lumian struck up a conversation with a few patrons near the bar counter, deliberately approaching one with a local accent.
"I met a nice chick," he said with a sly wink and an ambiguous smile. "We're going on a date later—on a quiet night. Can you share a few local horror stories? They don't have to be well-known, just terrifying enough, preferably with a specific location. For instance, if there's a horrifying tale about an empty house on a certain street, heh heh, I plan to take her there for our date."
The local, his beard dampened with ale, set down his oak beer mug and chuckled.
"How devious, but I like you! It's a battle of wits between men and women. For victory, anything goes!"
After a brief pause, the local suggested, "You can take her on a date at the edge of the forest outside the city. You know, a forest at night is always chilling. Besides, there might be more than one Demon lurking in the woods on Hanth Island.
"As far back as I can remember, the priests have been warning everyone against venturing deep into the forest or even thinking about cutting wood in the middle of the island. There are many hidden dangers.
"What kind of dangers, you ask? The priests never specify, but someone always tells me about some random person encountering a Demon with goat horns and an unpleasant sulfuric smell in the forest.
"As for those who claim to have seen the Demon with their own

eyes, it's said that they all met their demise—for some unknown reason.
"How about that? No woman isn't afraid of a Demon. Well, except my wife. She's even scarier than a Demon!"
Have the Demon stories on Hanth Island evolved to such an extent? It resembles the legend of the Montsouris ghost, but encountering a Montsouris ghost does result in the death of an entire family. Hanth Island doesn't have such an obvious characteristic... Lumian raised his glass of red wine, toasting the local before saying, "Though I'm quite charming, I doubt any chick would be willing to follow me to the edge of the forest outside the city on our first date, especially at night. Even if she's not afraid of me doing harm, she might worry that I'm a criminal with a penchant for harming young girls. How about this: Is there a legend of a serial killer? Ideally, one that haunts the city."
Drawing from Aurore's grimoires and the information gathered in recent months, Lumian discerned that Sequence 9 of the Demon pathway was Criminal, Sequence 8 was Coldblooded, and Sequence 7 was Serial Killer.
The name of Sequence 7, Serial Killer, indicated that Beyonders, regardless of their grasp of the acting method, would actively or passively engage in serial killings.
Although the Demon on Hanth Island had clearly surpassed Sequence 7 and evolved beyond the Serial Killer stage, Lumian wondered whether, as a high-ranking individual who had progressed through the ranks, it retained certain preferences acquired during its Serial Killer phase.
Intelligent beings, be they human or of a certain creature, tended to maintain certain desires if not deliberately restrained or controlled.
Just as humans might occasionally indulge in a drink, Demons might occasionally engage in serial killings.
Moreover, if Naboredisley's commission wasn't concocted merely for a verbal agreement, the Demon of Hanth Island or its descendants should be concealed among humans.
The bearded local pondered for a moment before responding, "There haven't been any serial killers. In a small place like ours, if serial murders were happening, everyone in the city would know." He paused, then added, "But what if someone goes missing in the forest outside the city every year? Would that count?"
...
In Trier, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony managed to gather sufficient information about Moran Avigny, the current Minister of Industry. This information included a color photograph.

In the picture, Moran Avigny displayed a striking resemblance to an Intisian. Despite his age, he exuded an air of elegance.
In his late sixties, his once-black hair had transitioned into a distinguished gray. Refined facial features and dark gray eyes added to his overall presence, with the wrinkles on his face highlighting the passage of time.
"Dark gray eyes are rare in Intis..." Franca sighed.
Mid-sentence, she abruptly halted.
Another individual with dark-gray eyes in Intis crossed her mind —Demoness of Black Clarice.

Chapter 622: Smell of Death

Under normal circumstances, dark-gray eyes wouldn't usually grab one's attention. Such pupils were rare in Intis but not uncommon in places like the Loen Kingdom. However, Franca sensed that there was crucial information hidden within.

Moran Avigny was suspected to be a Mirror Person. The Demoness of Black Clarice pursued the Mirror People, and being a demigod of the Demoness pathway closely related to the Mirror World, they all shared those unusual dark gray eyes.

Too much of a coincidence, isn't it?

"What's wrong?" Jenna asked with concern when Franca paused.

Franca deliberated for a few seconds before revealing that the Demoness of Black shared the same eye color as Moran Avigny. Finally, she said, "None of the Mirror People we encountered previously had such characteristics."

"Only relatively special Mirror People have them? Is the Demoness of Black also a Mirror Person?" Jenna guessed, her thoughts wandering.

"Impossible," Franca subconsciously denied. "She even tasked me with investigating the Mirror People... Right, it's not impossible. Haven't we read enough stories of burglars calling the police to catch thieves?"

Anthony thought for a moment and said, "Could it be a symbol of being corrupted by the mirror's Primordial Demoness? Could special Mirror People at a certain level have such eye color? Could it be the same for a Demoness who has become a demigod and has been corrupted?

"No, Moran Avigny should have had dark gray eyes to begin with. It's impossible for the Mirror People who replaced him to change the color of his eyes without attracting suspicion," Franca pondered and deduced, "In other words, does the Demoness of Black come from the same family as the original Moran Avigny? I previously thought she belonged to the Sauron family and was Browns Sauron's elder. Otherwise, she wouldn't have nurtured such a simple-minded Demoness. Now, it doesn't seem so..."

"Not necessarily," Franca and Jenna said in unison.

Everyone had a paternal and maternal side of the family. Just because they were from the Sauron family didn't mean they weren't from a dark-gray-eyed family!

Franca hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "It's been a while since I updated the Demoness of Black on the Mirror People investigation. I plan to visit her this week and discuss Moran Avigny."

"Be careful," Jenna cautioned.
A gleaming smile played on Franca's lips as she replied, "Don't worry. She tasked me with the Mirror People inquiry, so she should anticipate some updates. If she has ties with Moran Avigny, we might see something unfolding for the Minister of Industry shortly. If not, we can seek her assistance!"
...
On Hanth Island, Lumian strolled through the dimly lit streets, relishing the cool sea breeze that replaced the earlier heat as he casually headed back to the Berries.
Hands tucked into his pockets, his mind raced with unusual activity. He sifted through the legends and stories he had recently gathered, attempting to uncover any hints about the elusive Demon.
Had Madam Magician not issued a cautious warning, and had Naboredisley not disclosed the Demon descendant's name and identity, Lumian might have considered using himself as bait. In such circumstances, he could have showcased his malice, devised a plan with a chance of success, triggering the Demon's Danger Premonition, luring it out to eliminate the perceived threat. A concealed trap would await it.
It's been a century or two. Numerous adventurers have ventured to unravel the Demon legend. Despite the Church of Earth Mother's relentless efforts to eradicate lingering issues, there's still no resolution. Relying on conventional methods to track down that elusive Demon seems impractical...
Looking at it from a different angle, why would the Demon choose to remain on Hanth Island?
The Church of Earth Mother already purged it once. *Why take the risk to stay?*
If it were me, I would have relocated ages ago. As a Demon, where couldn't I survive?
If I truly believed I was a highly intelligent criminal—a genuine Criminal—why use such a method to taunt the clergy of the Church of Earth Mother? It would become dull after all these years...
Could there be a reason for its persistence on Hanth Island?
Is it perhaps partially sealed? Or is there something profoundly significant buried on the island that cannot be moved?
The valley ablaze with sulfurous flames?
Moreover, Demons can live for centuries, but ordinary people cannot. If the Demon indeed concealed itself in human towns, it would have to change identities every few decades, potentially leaving traces.

Hanth Island serves as a transit port for trade routes between the Northern and Southern Continents. With numerous foreign settlers, the Demon can effortlessly forge a new identity. However, how can it smoothly exit the stage with its original identity?
The residents here all devoutly follow Earth Mother. Upon their demise, they are invariably sent to the cathedral for a wake. Would a Demon have the audacity to feign death and undergo Earth Mother's scrutiny and the purifying touch of holy water?
Yes, vanishing is the optimal solution. Whether through a sea adventure or disappearing into the forest, it effectively sidesteps corresponding problems.
Every year, people vanish in the forest outside the city... Did the Demon purposely orchestrate some accidents, concealing its 'death' among them? Lumian's thoughts raced as he gradually formulated deductions and speculations.
This was also a tempering of a Conspirer's powers and a method to digest the potion.
He had a vague understanding of the entire situation.
If I want to locate the Demon concealed among humans, I must find the mysterious valley ablaze with sulfur flames deep in the forest. To unravel the valley's secret, I must rely on that Demon. These two matters are likely intertwined and inseparable.
Lumian had a tentative plan for tomorrow's investigation.
I'll begin by exploring the forest, utilizing my Hunter powers to search for the remains of the missing. If I discover one or two, and they still retain some edible structure, I'll bring them back to Ludwig and determine who the deceased last encountered.
Throughout this process, without alerting the clergy of the Church of Earth Mother, I'll delve deeper into the island to identify any anomalies. If they exist, what kind of anomalies they are...
As he strolled leisurely, Lumian suddenly looked up and observed the stars in the sky veiled by dark clouds.
In an instant, torrential rain poured down.
Drops of rain misted in front of Lumian. Without an umbrella, he had no choice but to dash under the eaves of a three-story building on the street and seek refuge outside a café with its lights off. He waited for the storm to end impassively.
The few pedestrians on the road unfurled their umbrellas.
Lumian couldn't help but chuckle as he recalled the common depiction of the Berserk Sea's islands in the travel guide: The weather is highly erratic; remember to bring an umbrella or a hat when out.
Clearly, Lumian didn't take the reminder seriously.
He wasn't in a rush. Leaning against the café's two glass windows,

he quietly observed the raindrops streak down and the people returning home late traverse different streets.
The sound of the rain masked all movement, and white mist veiled most of his vision, creating the sensation for Lumian as if he were in another world.
Observing this scene, Lumian reminisced about his wandering days.
Wanderers often struggled to predict the weather, making it challenging to secure refuge in cathedrals and other places in advance.
Consequently, he would occasionally huddle in a corner of a street, sheltered from the rain. He watched the rain with fear, worry, uneasiness, and gloom, praying that no other vagabond would snatch his temporary shelter.
But now, his mood was entirely different.
The heavy rain in the Berserk Sea ceased as swiftly as it had arrived. In less than half an hour, only stagnant water remained on the street.
Lumian chuckled and tucked his hands back into his pockets. He strolled along the wet street toward the harbor and boarded the Berries.
Just as Lumian pushed open the door and entered, he saw Lugano wiping Ludwig's dripping hair with a dry and fluffy towel. Ludwig looked as if he had taken an unexpected plunge.
"You didn't bring an umbrella?" Lumian asked with a smile.
Lugano replied awkwardly, "I thought I was a Planter and could predict changes in the weather in advance, so I didn't bring an umbrella and led Ludwig to the streets to buy supper. He said he didn't want to eat cakes and biscuits tonight. Sigh, who knew that even though I predicted a rainstorm, it only took tens of seconds before it arrived. At that time, I wanted to carry Ludwig and rush back to the ship before the rain started..."
Seeing that the Doctor didn't seek an objective reason and only complained about his lack of ability, Lumian kindly added,
"This is the weather in the Berserk Sea. Even Planters can't predict it."
This was also one of the reasons why the islands in the Berserk Sea, clearly under the rule of the Church of Earth Mother, didn't always experience bumper harvests like the Feynapotter Kingdom.
"Yes, yes, yes." Lugano heaved a sigh of relief.
Lumian turned to Ludwig, whose hair was now dry, and casually inquired, "Do you smell anything?"
Is there any particularly alluring "food" hidden nearby?
Ludwig nibbled on a tortilla and responded, "There's the smell of

death."
Smell of death? Lumian frowned slightly.
"Did someone die near the night market?"
Ludwig shook his head.
"When it rains, there's the smell of death everywhere."
What... what does this mean? Lumian probed, voicing his doubts.
Ludwig replied candidly, "I don't know. It disappeared later."
It happens when it rains, but not after... Is this an abnormality from the Berserk Sea, or is it the island's abnormality triggered by the Berserk Sea's weather? Lumian pondered for a moment, but he wasn't in a rush to write to Madam Magician and inquire.
This was a digestion opportunity for him. He felt that he should avoid relying on the power of a high-ranking person to digest it better unless it was crucial.
That night, Lumian fell asleep with a heavy heart.
In his hazy dream, he saw many familiar and unfamiliar things.
The pale-white Samaritan Women's Spring, the mountain- sized Blood Emperor's afterimage dripping with yellowish magma, and the unknown object protruding from the spring...
The scene suddenly changed, revealing Lumian wandering alone in the deep darkness underground.
It was as if he had become the Montsouris ghost.

Chapter 623: Grave Digging

In the endless darkness, cramped quarters, and jumbled thoughts, Lumian found himself unusually frustrated, even within the confines of his dreams. He longed to rip apart the cage around him and shatter everything in his path.

Slowly, the realization dawned upon him that he was dreaming. He struggled to open his eyes and wake up, but his efforts were in vain. Each time he thought he had finally awakened, in the blink of an eye, he plunged into a deeper darkness and a more profound dream.

After an unknown stretch of time, Lumian naturally awoke to some light seeping through the curtained window.

It was 6 a.m.

Lumian raised his right hand and wiped his forehead, sensing a layer of cold sweat.

Is this a spiritual warning, or had memories of the Samaritan Women's Spring and the afterimage of the Blood Emperor haunted me after I contemplated the smell of death on Hanth Island yesterday? Previously, I had drawn connections between the mysterious deaths of those who witnessed the Demon and the Montsouris ghost, possibly leading to a shallow corruption? Lumian couldn't accurately decipher the complete meaning of the dream. All he could do was remind himself to be cautious and stay focused on his original goal for coming to Hanth Island:

To investigate the Demon legends, not to eliminate the Demon.

Setting aside whether he possessed the strength to face the Demon or if he needed assistance, the fact that the Church of Earth Mother had operated on the island for over a century without completely eradicating the target suggested even the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holders might not resolve this matter entirely.

Lumian got out of bed and retrieved the golden pocket watch from Salle de Bal Brise. Opening and glancing at it: 6:01 a.m.

Though early, Lumian felt a sense of urgency. The Berries would depart from Hanth Island the morning after tomorrow. He had only two days to delve into the Demon legends, unravel the truth, and identify potential suspects.

If he succeeded, his Conspirer potion might very well be digested.

Gathering, screening, and utilizing information were crucial aspects of a conspiracy!

And if Lumian were a Sequence 7 Detective of the Reader pathway, successfully solving a century-old unsolved case involving high-level powers in just two days would be a remarkable leap from initial digestion to complete digestion.

...
At 9 a.m., in the suburbs of Port Hanth, Return Cemetery.
Holding a bunch of yellow flowers, Lumian navigated through the tree-lined cemetery.
Armed with Ludwig's intel and the insights from the previous night's dream, he adjusted his plan. Instead of hastily venturing into the forest to search for the missing people's remains, he decided to dig up graves here!
His objective: to investigate the circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of someone who had glimpsed the Demon's figure in the forest depths. He aimed to discover if they would meet the same fate as those killed by the Montsouris ghost—exhibiting self-mutilation.
According to the gathered information, the last person to report the Demon's presence to the Church of Earth Mother rested in a quiet corner of Return Cemetery.
His name was Antonio Elias.
Before long, Lumian, clutching the bouquet of yellow flowers, reached the grave. Apart from the deceased's name, birth and death dates, a concise epitaph adorned the stone tombstone: "This wretched man's life was taken by a Demon."
Lumian stooped down, placing the bouquet before the tombstone. Then, he straightened up, silently studying the stone tomb.
Details about Antonio Elias flashed through his mind.
A local, not a foreigner, with parents, a wife, and children. Nine months ago, during a hunting trip in the forest, he encountered a wandering Demon. Fearing his imminent demise, he sought refuge in the cathedral and cloister of the Church of Earth Mother for a full five months. Afterwards, intending to serve as a crew member for three years, steering clear of Hanth Island and its hidden dangers, he was discovered dead at the bottom of the cabin on his second voyage...
Lumian scanned the surroundings, gathering ten to twenty withered branches from beneath nearby trees. He planted them around Antonio Elias's tomb, forming a short, makeshift, and somewhat futile barrier.
Lastly, he laid a withered branch flat on two adjacent branches, constructing a shaky door impassable to anyone.
With that completed, Lumian stepped over the "wall" and entered the grave.
He then bent down, extending his right hand to touch the makeshift door constructed of withered branches.
Simultaneously, a black mark activated on his body.
In the blink of an eye, Lumian's figure vanished. Antonio's tomb

remained undisturbed, except for the added circle of withered branches.
In reality, Lumian had retrieved an iron pick, shovel, and other items from his just-purchased Traveler's Bag. He began prying open the stone slabs and digging into the soil.
Bottle of Fiction!
Lumian utilized the "wall" and "door" he had fashioned to employ the Bottle of Fiction contract ability.
In less than two minutes, relying on his understanding of the cemetery's layout and two precise explosions, Lumian cleared the soil from the coffin and pried open the black-painted wooden plank.
A pungent odor of decay wafted out, and Lumian casually ignited it.
After a brief wait, he squatted down, donned gloves, and examined the white bones, now devoid of flesh and blood.
The first item he picked up was Antonio Elias's skull. With a cursory glance, he noted cracks on the inside of the skull, while the exterior remained intact.
A brain explosion as the cause of death? Lumian pondered the force required to induce such damage. Regardless of the ability responsible, Antonio's cerebrum, cerebellum, and brain stem should have exploded into mush at the time of his demise. It seemed illogical for the hard inner cranium to crack while the soft brain remained unharmed.
Examining Antonio Elias's other bones yielded no additional injuries. The stains in the coffin offered no further clues.
Lumian concluded that Antonio's death resulted from an internal explosion in his head. The explosive force, while not physically strong enough to shatter his skull entirely, was sufficient to destroy his brain.
With Fire Infusion, I can precisely control the quantity and quality of the flames. I should be able to achieve a similar effect.
How did the Demon do it? Lumian's comprehension of the Demon pathway came from his sister's grimoires, information provided by the Tarot Club, and Franca's account. He had only truly interacted with a Demon above Sequence 6 once, and that was with Naboredisley.
He immediately recollected the sensations when Naboredisley stirred his desires and emotions. The echoes of the ranting transmitted through the gray fog during Naboredisley's expulsion and the tumult of his own desires replayed in his mind.
For ordinary people, inducing an upheaval in their desires before detonating them could lead to their brains exploding, given an

increase in potency... It shouldn't be a challenging feat for a demigod creature like a Demon. Moreover, the Demon can use those ravings to achieve this remotely? As Lumian completed his deduction, he was convinced that a Demon was indeed concealed on Hanth Island. A Demon of the Criminal pathway, a Demon surpassing Sequences like Devil and Desire Apostle.
With this confirmation, Lumian believed it would be relatively straightforward to locate the Demon if he put his mind to it.
However, the prerequisite was finding it and not resolving the situation, all while risking his life.
Removing the glove, he reached into his Traveler's Bag and touched the Flog boxing gloves.
Following the incident with the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings and the Great Mother, Lumian had already speculated that the Mother Tree of Desire stood at the peak of the Prisoner, Criminal, and Scrooge pathways. Therefore, the Rose School of Thought's indulgence faction and some members of the Devil family believed in Her and followed Her.
In that case, the Flog boxing gloves made from the branches of the Tree of Shadow, closely related to the Mother Tree of Desire, had a high chance of attracting the Demon's attention within a certain range. Just as its negative effects meant being observed by some hidden entities, influenced and attacked by dangerous creatures!
Phew, there are no useless items. Only Beyonders who don't know how to usethem.
Lumian chuckled self-deprecatingly and withdrew his right hand from the Flog boxing gloves.
He abandoned the plan to directly lure out the Demon.
This decision stemmed from the realization that the Demon was still active on the island, claiming lives, yet the Church of Earth Mother hadn't eradicated it completely!
Having encountered various challenges, Lumian possessed a reasonable understanding of an orthodox Church's strength. He knew that if the Church of Earth Mother genuinely committed, it could eliminate all residents suspected to be Demons and obliterate the island, similar to what the Church of Storms had done to Bansy Harbor.
It wasn't that the Church of Earth Mother lacked the will, but there was a reason holding them back.
This brought Lumian's thoughts back to the valley burning with sulfurous flames deep in the forest. He believed that the Demon couldn't be slain under regular circumstances. It could only be sealed and constrained.
As the Church of Earth Mother couldn't achieve this, and Lumian

doubted his ability to do so, enticing the Demon directly would be futile and perilous.
Lumian's current strategy involved leveraging his fake level and his allure to evil gods to traverse the forest.
During critical moments, he planned to use the Flog boxing gloves to see if he could converge on the mysterious valley burning with sulfur flames to investigate the source of the Demon legends.
...
In the heart of the forest, surrounded by towering trees, Lumian navigated a path untouched by human presence for years. He moved forward at a measured pace.
From time to time, he would extract the Flog boxing gloves, relying on intuition to guide his course. After ten to twenty seconds, he stowed them away.
After almost an hour, the dense forest unexpectedly cleared.
A menacing brown bear emerged from behind a tree, advancing toward Lumian with ponderous steps.
"Stop, foreigner!"
The bear's mouth emitted a buzzing human voice.

Chapter 624: More Than One?

Lumian remained unfazed as the brown bear uttered words in precise Highlander. Instead of fear, delight filled him--a clear sign that he had stumbled upon the correct location!

This was the Planter pathway, the main pathway of the Church of Earth Mother, known as a Druid at Sequence 5. Capable of transforming into a formidable three-meter-tall bear.

Encountering a human-speaking brown bear in the desolate forest of Hanth Island hinted at his proximity to the heavily guarded area, possibly the mysterious valley of sulfur flames from Demon legends.

Without the signature golden straw hat, Lumian studied the brown bear's furry visage openly, making no effort to conceal his extraordinary nature.

"Alright," he sighed with regret, turning on his heels and retracing his steps.

Twenty to thirty meters away, Lumian vanished from the brown bear's view, concealed by towering trees that had stood for over a century.

He halted, leaning against a tree trunk, and casually retrieved an item from his Traveler's Bag.

It was a pair of brown gold-rimmed glasses--the Mystery Prying Glasses!

Lumian had no intention of recklessly breaching the Church of Earth Mother's protective circle and venturing into the sealed-off region.

Perhaps it was no safer than confronting the hidden Demon on Hanth Island.

Without sufficient and effective information, Lumian wasn't inclined to take such risks.

What if it resembled Fourth Epoch Trier?

Lumian's strategy involved skirting the edges of the problem zone, wielding the Mystery Prying Glasses to shift his perspective and uncover hidden truths.

From Lumian's familiarity with the Mystery Prying Glasses from previous, the item's lower level hindered his ability to directly perceive various seals. In Trier, he had utilized them multiple times but couldn't catch a direct glimpse of Fourth Epoch Trier. Instead, he witnessed concealed elements beneath the ground, lurking in darkness, or disguised through distorted, overlooking, or prying angles.

This inherent flaw safeguarded Lumian from directly encountering the Church of Earth Mother's sealed artifact, thus

averting potential catastrophe. Nonetheless, it allowed him to discern abnormal traces.
And that was sufficient!
More traces equaled more information, bringing Lumian closer to the elusive truth!
Ready to teleport at a moment's notice, Lumian positioned the brown gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose.
An unsettling dizziness gripped him, akin to being buried underground. Despite looking up at the soil, trees, and sky, he sensed an elevated vantage point, overseeing everything.
Withering tree bark, decaying leaves, crawling insects, and animals circling a water source--all these details and buried bones spun in Lumian's vision, inducing nausea from the depths of his soul.
Amidst the nausea creeping from the depths of his soul, Lumian's gaze fixated on a startling sight.
Silent blue flames devoured the entire landscape.
Whether above, below, or around the flames, the trees swiftly transformed into an inky black, dissolving into sewage. From the decaying remnants, new trees sprouted, rapidly expanding and flourishing.
In the midst of the blue inferno, Lumian vaguely discerned a crimson, colossal figure sprawled at the core. Submerged in pitch-black, viscous sewage, it sank gradually, only to be yanked upward by an invisible force.
This unseen power emanated from beyond the withering and burgeoning forest, from...
Abruptly, a pair of eyes materialized within Lumian's line of sight.
They were bloodshot, icy-blue eyes tinged with pain.
Without hesitation, Lumian removed the Mystery Prying Glasses and activated the black mark representing Spirit World Traversal.
Swiftly fading, he disappeared into the forest and reappeared outside the Church of Earth Mother Cathedral in Port Hanth, behind the familiar stone pillar observed earlier that morning.
After stashing the Mystery Prying Glasses back into his Traveler's Bag, Lumian departed the secluded spot. Blending in with believers, he entered the cathedral exuding scents of wheat and milk, occupying a pew closest to the Sacred Emblem of Life. With crossed arms, he mimicked the old man in a black formal suit, feigning prayer.
Only then did he exhale a sigh of relief, assured that those icy-blue eyes wouldn't target or lock onto him.
These Mystery Prying Glasses could pass through countless hands if not in my possession. Its negative effects are indeed unique and

beneficial, but they're also very dangerous... Lumian couldn't help but sigh inwardly.

Then, he analyzed the scenes witnessed through the Mystery Prying Glasses.

There's a region engulfed in sulfur flames, but the Church of Earth Mother's trees seal it off, cycling between death and rebirth. It's nearly impossible to spot from the outside. Even with the Mystery Prying Glasses, I can only vaguely discern its outline.

It's akin to lurking outside a cage and surveying the interior through the gaps in the railing. Despite the Mystery Prying Glasses' capabilities, they shouldn't breach the seal.

That colossal, blood-colored figure resembles a small mountain, yet I can't discern any details... *Could it be the true form of the Demon of Hanth Island?* How can others see it when it's sealed inside, causing those who witness it to mysteriously vanish?

Could there be more than one Demon on Hanth Island? The ice-blue eyes staring at me may belong to another Demon. Is it utilizing the invisible connection between itself and the blood-colored Demon to prevent its descent into the pitch-
black, viscous sewage?

If so, the Church of Earth Mother should eliminate the Demon active both outside and on the island. By doing so, the blood-colored Demon would lose its assistance.

Or does the Church of Earth Mother not want the blood-
colored Demon to completely sink into the pitch-black sewage, letting the ice-blue-eyed Demon exist only to restrict its range and frequency?

If it's not entirely sealed, would the invisible connection between the two parties disappear? Is it because the ice-blue-
eyed Demon will also be affected by the pitch-black sewage?

Lumian deepened his understanding and speculations regarding the Demon legends on Hanth Island. He sensed that his Conspirer potion had become active, showing signs of digestion, but it was still one step away.

He wasn't in a rush to succeed. Instead, he pondered the mission that Naboredisley hadn't entrusted to him and Franca.

Killing a Demon descendant from an island in the Berserk Sea...

That's correct, a descendant! The ice-blue-eyed Demon is a descendant of that blood-colored Demon. *Is that why an invisible connection binds them?*

Does Naboredisley desire the blood-colored Demon to fully submerge into the pitch-black sewage?

Is this beneficial or detrimental for the blood-colored Demon?

If it's beneficial, it makes sense why the Earth Mother Church

impedes it. Why does the blood-colored Demon's descendant persist in pulling and preventing its descent?
Suppose the ice-blue-eyed Demon is under the control of the Church of Earth Mother, yet it can kill and cause disappearances. Conversely, why doesn't it flee Hanth Island? This implies that it's not in the ice-blue-eyed Demon's favor if the blood-colored Demon were to completely sink into the pitch-black sewage. It's even willing to forfeit its freedom to obstruct it.
If it's not favorable, perhaps Naboredisley isn't deceiving. It's an adversary of the blood-colored Demon, hoping for its complete submersion and assimilation by the pitch-black sewage. This might have a certain impact on Hanth Island, the Berserk Sea, or even the entire world. That's why the Church of Earth Mother seals and monitors it...
Can't they just kill it? Without the blood-colored Demon, the issue of it sinking completely into the pitch-black sewage would cease...
Can't be killed?
What Naboredisley feared wasn't that the blood-colored Demon might sense danger, but that the Church of Earth Mother might be alerted?
Lumian gradually understood the mentality and stance of the Church of Earth Mother, the local Demon, and Naboredisley, but he lacked sufficient evidence.
What he was most certain of now was: the pitch-black, viscous sewage wasn't simple!
Perhaps it was something akin to the Samaritan Women's Spring.
Furthermore, it bore a striking resemblance to the pitch-black form of the Montsouris ghost.
Trier's catacombs is a labyrinth of complexity, filled with corruption and unique monsters that defy easy elimination. It's the aftermath of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's significant accomplishment, an act that nearly brought the gods down with Him. Ultimately, He perished. *What could be the reason for Hanth Island? Could it be a divine battle and the demise of a deity?*
That's not beyond the realm of possibility... While my knowledge of the Fourth Epoch's history is limited, I do know that the Berserk Sea was not as tumultuous back then. There were still interactions between the Northern and Southern Continents. Could it be that another emperor from the War of the Four Emperors or two emperors met Their end here, permanently reshaping the terrain and weather to give rise to the Berserk Sea?
Is this the manifestation of a deity's power? The Blood Emperor sank a colossal city underground, forcing over a million people to live above it to contain the subsequent effects. And the deity who

perished here has been influencing the Berserk Sea for more than a thousand years. This surpasses the waters near Port Santa... As Lumian sighed, he prepared to stand up and return to the Berries to strategize his next move for gathering more information.

Sensing the quietude around him, his movements softened, cautious not to disturb the prayers of the Earth Mother believers.

Subconsciously scanning his surroundings, Lumian noticed that the believer beside him had also finished praying and retracted his arms.

A gray-haired old man in a black formal suit with a bow tie caught Lumian's eye. His face bore well-defined features, and his beard was meticulously shaved.

In the next moment, Lumian observed the elder turning his head—revealing bloodshot ice-blue eyes.

Chapter 625: Repentance

Ice-blue eyes!
That Demon!
It's lurking right there in the cathedral!
Lumian tensed. Without a second thought, he tried to teleport away.
This time, he chose Trier--the entrance to Saint ViÃ¨ve Cathedral!
In that moment, his reflection stared back at him in those chilling, ice-blue eyes.
His face twisted, expression sinister, eyes cold.
Soon, Lumians manifested, encircling him.
There was one Lumian, eyes intoxicated, breathing heavy, face flushed red. Another, trembling in fear. Another, expressionless and resolute. One, lost and sorrowful. Another, with no will to live. And one more, eyes filled with anger and hatred, red with intensity...
In an instant, Lumian seemed to multiply into countless versions, each appearing tangible.
This severely impacted his thoughts and actions, hindering him from activating the contract mark representing Spirit World Traversal.
Instinctively, he focused his remaining will on his right hand and the mark left by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor.
To escape this state and gain the strength to teleport away, he needed to terrify the ice-blue-eyed Demon!
Suddenly, Lumian heard ravings filled with intense madness and depravity.
His mind turned to mush, swelling dangerously.
The Blood Emperor's aura didn't activate in time.
Fragmented, emotional, and painful thoughts burst in Lumian's mind like fireworks before gradually descending.
An intense burning sensation in his chest anchored him, preventing complete loss of self.
After an unknown span of time, Lumian finally regained command of his thoughts.
His first thought was: I'm still alive?
It must have been a considerable duration since the onslaught of ravings and his subsequent awakening. The Demon's power could have easily ended him multiple times!
As Lumian concentrated on his right hand, he scrutinized the Demon with ice-blue eyes.
The white-haired Demon, adorned in a black formal suit and bow tie, sat upright once more, facing the Sacred Emblem of Life. It

inclined slightly, crossing its arms over its chest.
Shutting its eyes, it whispered with a pained expression, "Oh, merciful Mother, I implore your mercy for my transgressions..."
Merciful Mother, I implore your mercy for my transgressions...
Lumian's resolve wavered as he abandoned activating the Blood Emperor's aura.
He settled beside the Demon.
Observing the Sacred Emblem of Life on the altar, he waited silently, refraining from disrupting the Demon's repentance. Contemplating his encounter, he mused quietly.
The various selves I witnessed must be genuine illusions--not existing in the physical world but within my heart and mind...
Could this be a sophisticated manifestation of emotional and desire fluctuations, triggering individual emotions and desires to vie for control of the body without reaching the point of dissociation?
The subsequent ravings resembled Naboredisley's frenzied curse upon expulsion. Yet, this time, there was no shield from Mr. Fool's gray fog. Well, not entirely absent. Otherwise, the mad river of ravings would have capsized my identity. Even if I hadn't lost control, I would have succumbed completely before the Demon found its "conscience" and started repenting...
I believed the safest haven on Hanth Island was the cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother. I specifically chose it to evade the Demon. Surprisingly, it's praying here... Judging by this, blind trust in the orthodox Church's cathedrals might not be foolproof in the future. Without adequate information, nothing is absolute...
Yet, it was only within the cathedral that I survived. Anywhere else, it would be Termiboros grappling with the ice-blue-eyed Demon. Then, the Angels of the orthodox Churches and the Tarot Club would descend...
Lumian had formed some hypotheses and waited with assurance. He condensed his experiences and absorbed his lesson.
After a brief span, the white-haired, ice-blue-eyed Demon, donned in a black formal suit, concluded its repentance. Its expression regained composure, but the blood vessels in its eyes deepened.
Only then did Lumian observe the black leather gloves on both of its hands. Even during confession and prayer, they remained unremoved--a departure from devout believer behavior. In the human world, wearing gloves while praying was deemed disrespectful to a deity, except in emergencies or special circumstances. The same applied to wearing a hat.
The Demon cast a glance at Lumian and spoke in a deep but composed voice, "You haven't fled yet. Aren't you afraid of angering

me again?"
Lumian gazed at the Sacred Emblem of Life and smiled.
"I'm not. This is Earth Mother's cathedral."
"Weren't we in the cathedral just now?" The Demon moderated its volume, not disturbing the other supplicants.
"Occasional accidents are understandable," Lumian replied unhurriedly. "Moreover, I believe you can certainly control yourself in a short period. It'll be more challenging beyond half a year."
The Demon also directed its gaze at the altar, its ice-blue eyes reflecting the Sacred Emblem of Life.
"Why do you think so?"
"I'm an experienced adventurer," Lumian said with a smile. "I know that orthodox Churches adhere to a common rule. Survivors entangled in a mysticism incident are often drawn into the Church if there's any hidden danger. They become civilian staff and receive long-term protection to prevent sudden deaths. However, those who witnessed the Demon's figure on Hanth Island didn't undergo this process. They only received a few months of protection before departing.
"Could it be that the Church fears prolonged stays might lead to deaths even within the cathedral or cloister?
"In such instances, it would undoubtedly tarnish the Church's reputation. One can't keep a constant watch on higher-level powers indefinitely."
The white-haired Demon fell silent for a few moments before confessing, "I didn't want to kill them, but I..."
At this point, its face twisted once more, icy-blue eyes filled with pain.
Once again, it crossed its arms over its chest, resuming a low-voiced prayer.
This time, it swiftly regained its composure.
Lumian resumed the conversation with a smile.
"Don't tell me you penned all those epitaphs for those people?"
"That's correct." The Demon in the black suit maintained its slightly forward-leaning posture.
It seems this Demon has a rather amicable relationship with the Church of Earth Mother... Not strictly devout, but a believer nonetheless... Lumian understood that the ice-blue- eyed Demon wouldn't respond even if he inquired. Such questions might even provoke serious consequences. He had to capitalize on its stable emotions to seek some details.
Before Lumian could speak, the Demon posed a question.
"Foreigner, why did you come to Hanth Island?"
Lumian deliberately smiled.

"I previously encountered a Demon incident..."
Lumian briefly recounted Salah's encounter with the Love Incantation in Port Colla. While leading the investigation, the suspect's body had been suddenly commandeered by a Demon seeking a deal, which he rejected. Lumian, utilizing undisclosed official powers, had then expelled the other party.
Lumian omitted details about the Love Incantation's content and refrained from mentioning Naboredisley's name, fearing deep-seated animosity that might trigger intense agitation.
Concluding, he stated, "I read in the notebook about Demon legends on Hanth Island, connected to the deal the Demon sought. Intrigued, I decided to investigate. My intention wasn't to finish off anyone."
"You can't finish off anyone either," the Demon with ice-blue eyes remarked candidly.
It continued gazing at the Sacred Emblem of Life and added in a calm, deep voice, "Curiosity kills the cat."
Lumian chuckled.
"It's indeed risky, but finding you within a day and discovering the sealed valley indicates my capabilities."
Next time, I'll choose a safer "sanctuary."
The Demon with ice-blue eyes, with few wrinkles, smiled—an uncommon sight.
"Your methods are unconventional, but they align with the mysticism world's underlying laws.
"But had I not controlled myself and repented for past deeds, you would be dead. Such an investigation would have been futile."
Lumian didn't dispute. With the information he gathered, he knew there was no immediate danger in the cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother. The recent episode proved to be a false alarm.
He shifted the topic.
"Why did that inexplicable Demon target you?
"Moreover, with the strength of me and my companions, it's likely impossible to eradicate a so-called Demon descendant like you. Was it deliberately leading us to our demise?"
The Demon, clad in a black suit, kept its gaze fixed on the Sacred Emblem of Life and responded, "I'm not certain which one you encountered."
It refused to disclose more.
Lumian didn't dare press further, let alone provoke. His mind raced, searching for an alternate approach.
"You seem unrestricted. Why not leave Hanth Island?
"There appears to be some force influencing you here."
The Demon's expression twisted as it stated, "This is my duty and

my atonement.
"Since converting to Earth Mother, there are times when I can't resist the urge to kill, accumulating profound sins."
Recalling his earlier deduction, Lumian inquired casually, "Then why not fully confine yourself?"
"Confinement won't suffice. I can't do it, and it can't be achieved that way." The Demon with ice-blue eyes displayed pain once again.
Indeed, closely tied to the blood-colored Demon in the valley... Yet, as a Coldblooded, why does the act of killing, and the subsequent "healing" by the Church of Earth Mother's reverence for life, still cause you pain? Lumian decided to steer the conversation to a less sensitive realm and soothe the other party.
In a relaxed tone, he said, "I apologize. I wasn't courteous earlier and failed to inquire about your preferred address."
The Demon with ice-blue eyes stared blankly for a moment before responding, "Naboredisley."

Chapter 626: Blatant Malice

Naboredisley? Lumian almost thought the ice-blue-eyed Demon was jesting with him.

However, he swiftly confirmed a crucial detail.

When it came to matters concerning the Love Incantation, he had never uttered the name Naboredisley!

Not only did he fear that Naboredisley and the ice-blue-eyed Demon were adversaries, but he also adhered to Madam Magician's instructions to abstain from writing or speaking this name.

If so, why did the ice-blue-eyed Demon identify itself as Naboredisley?

Could it truly be the genuine Naboredisley?

Then, why did the repeated chanting of "Naboredisley" summon a different Demon and not the ice-blue-eyed one?

Or were they equals? Was Naboredisley scheming to manipulate someone else into killing me?

Amidst Lumian's astonishment and confusion, a smile crept onto his face.

"I wouldn't dare utter that name."

He was testing the Demon with ice-blue eyes.

The Demon with ice-blue eyes turned towards Lumian.

"You've heard of Naboredisley and are aware of the concealed perils of uttering this name?"

"Yes," Lumian replied with a grin.

From the Demon's reaction, it seems unlikely to be the one propagating the Love Incantation... That's intriguing... Lumian pondered.

Though this might unveil greater horrors and deeper secrets, as a Hunter, fear and curiosity didn't contradict each other. It was akin to how everyone in the army feared death, yet it didn't deter them from banding together for combat.

The Demon with ice-blue eyes nodded slowly and spoke, "Here, within Earth Mother's cathedral, you needn't fret about uttering the name Naboredisley."

"That's evidently not the name you typically go by. Why don't you disclose your true name instead?" Lumian didn't reply. Instead, he posed a query.

He had a persistent feeling that the other party intended to harm him.

Had he not encountered the Love Incantation and received guidance from Madam Magician, he might have inadvertently mentioned the concealed Demon on Hanth Island, Naboredisley,

after leaving Earth Mother's cathedral today. That could have been troublesome!
The Demon with ice-blue eyes fell silent for a few moments before stating, "The name I go by in human society holds no significance for you.
"Moreover, after learning the name Naboredisley and uttering it at least three times outside the cathedral...
At this juncture, the white-haired Demon's visage twitched, and a pained expression surfaced.
"I will establish a connection with you. When I can no longer control myself, I may choose to end your life. Ending the life of an uninformed adventurer like you, seeking to uncover the truth of Hanth Island's legend, would bring me greater satisfaction than harming ordinary people. I won't feel as regretful or guilty."
The ice-blue-eyed Demon gazed at the Sacred Emblem of Life once more, bowed its head, and expressed remorse.
"Oh, merciful Mother, I implore your mercy for my transgressions. I should not have harbored malevolent intentions..."
The corners of Lumian's mouth twitched, and his expression darkened.
Did you genuinely intend to harm me?
He couldn't afford to let his guard down for a moment when dealing with Demons. Vigilance was paramount, even if it was a Demon professing allegiance to Earth Mother!
Moreover, a seemingly innocuous conversation could clandestinely plant a time bomb. Any other adventurer would have fallen victim to it. Truly befitting the Criminal pathway, known for its high IQ crimes...
Cold, calculating, and overtly malicious...
After the ice-blue-eyed Demon, self-identified as Naboredisley, concluded its repentance, Lumian feigned a nonchalant smile and remarked,
"If you truly cannot control yourself and desire to take a life, target pirates. It aligns with a sense of justice."
The ice-blue-eyed Demon's expression darkened as it retorted, "This is my prison. I cannot depart until I have atoned. If any pirates enter Port Hanth, I will make them vanish into the forest outside the city."
Lumian nodded and redirected the conversation.
"The Love Incantation I mentioned earlier was the name you brought up. The Demon who proposed a deal with me also identified itself with that name."
The gray-haired, ice-blue-eyed Demon remained silent, gazing at the Sacred Emblem of Life for an extended period.

Rather than detecting anger and animosity, Lumian sensed surprise and bewilderment.
What... It can't pinpoint the Demon's true identity either? *Is there no direct connection between the two parties?* Lumian pondered inwardly.
After a while, the ice-blue-eyed Demon, self-dubbed Naboredisley, spoke,
"According to you, the Love Incantation has been clandestinely circulating for many years, yet I've never established a connection with anyone outside Hanth Island."
"I'm puzzled by that too. Could it be that someone can intercept the direction of the name? Is it conceivable to assume your identity in the future?" Lumian feigned curiosity as an adventurer.
He believed that, based on Madam Magician's words, Mr. Fool could accomplish such a feat. Amon was capable of it once too. Whether any Demon could do it remained unknown for now.
The ice-blue-eyed Demon fell silent once more. After a few seconds, it spoke with a deep voice,
"Foreigner, you've inquired enough. Let's conclude it here. Otherwise, you may meet your end unknowingly."
Clad in a formal black suit, the Demon self-dubbed Naboredisley slowly rose. It positioned its feet apart, raised its hands adorned with black leather gloves, and whispered,
"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"
Then, it turned around, picked up its cane, and shuffled towards the cathedral's door, bathed in the midday sun.
Lumian scrutinized the ice-blue-eyed Demon, realizing it wasn't tall and appeared rather thin. It emitted a withered and feeble aura, resembling that of an elderly ordinary human. It hardly resembled a terrifying and mighty Demon.
Observing closely, Lumian sensed a dark, blatant malice expanding and contracting beneath the thin human skin and aged flesh. The Demon struggled to maintain composure, refraining from tearing through its fragile facade.
The frightening inner core sharply contrasted with its frail appearance, yet the overall aura seemed feeble and commonplace.
This is reminiscent of Ludwig... One is a child concealing an unknown monster beneath the skin, while the other is a pitch-black Demon concealed within an old man's body... Lumian exerted great effort to refrain from fixating on scrutinizing the ice-blue-eyed Demon's luck.
The gray-haired elder in black leather gloves, wielding a cane, slowly departed from the cathedral.
Lumian wasn't in a rush to return to the Berries. He remained

seated in the first row, contemplating the local Demon legends, which had recently become clearer yet were shrouded in numerous mysteries.
Suddenly, from the corner of his eye, he spotted a brown clergyman's uniform.
This was the attire of a clergyman from the Church of Earth Mother.
Lumian looked up and saw a middle-aged man with well-defined facial features and thick eyebrows. He noticed a pair of bloodshot, ice-blue eyes filled with pain.
Ice-blue eyes?
Dammit! Lumian's hair stood on end as he cursed inwardly.
The ice-blue-eyed clergyman sat beside Lumian, where the Demon had been.
He smiled warmly and said, "Don't provoke Boselli or attempt his suggestions. His self-control diminishes with age."
"Boselli? Are you referring to the old gentleman with ice-blue eyes?" Lumian feigned ignorance.
"Yes." The ice-blue-eyed clergyman nodded slightly.
Lumian pondered for a moment and grinned.
"What about you? How's your self-control?"
"I'm much better than him. I lose control only once every few years," the ice-blue-eyed clergyman replied candidly.
Is he admitting that he's also a Demon? I'm not in Earth Mother's cathedral, but a Devil family's dining room... Lumian felt a chill and couldn't help but criticize.
Maintaining a composed smile, he said, "Are you acquainted with him? Are you from the same family?"
The ice-blue-eyed clergyman reflected for a moment and replied, "We're all born in the Port Hanth Cloister."
Children born in a cloister? The description made Lumian uneasy.
In other Churches, having a child in a cloister was a grave matter, deviating from the teachings of the deity, a symptom of succumbing to carnal desires and blaspheming faith.
Lumian pondered for a moment before reaching a realization.
This was the Church of Earth Mother. The more nuns and monks had children in the cloister, the more aligned with the doctrine!
He immediately understood why the ice-blue-eyed clergyman and Boselli were born in the cloister.
It would conceal their origins and identities well, preventing them from implicating ordinary families.
This shattered Lumian's previous deductions about the local Demons.
Demons didn't need to vanish to conceal their "corpses." The

Church of Earth Mother would assist in concealing them. For instance, replacing genuine holy water with distilled water during a wake and later providing new identities and legal origins.
My earlier deduction was based on the assumption that the Church of Earth Mother and the local Demons weren't allies. No wonder there are so many errors... This is a factor I need to be mindful of when crafting conspiracies in the future. If I'm mistaken, any subsequent clever arrangements will lose their significance... It seems the Church of Earth Mother is directly offering protection to these ice-blue-eyed Demons, both resisting restrictions and cooperating to shield them? Lumian reflected on his investigations over the past two days.
This introspection couldn't enable him to digest the potion completely, but he felt it was more beneficial than a complete digestion.
Lumian gazed at the clergyman with ice-blue eyes and inquired with a smile, "Could it be that you're also using the name Boselli mentioned just now?"
The ice-blue-eyed clergyman responded with a warm smile.
"Yes, my name is also Naboredisley."
Without waiting for Lumian to probe further, it continued, "I don't know your background, but you can report Hanth Island to the other orthodox Churches. I believe they will advise you against delving into the truth of the Demon legends.
"Just as Boselli mentioned, Foreigner, let's conclude this here. Leave Hanth Island."
Lumian nodded, stood up, and departed from the cathedral.
Under the bright sunlight, he strolled along the street, his mind filled with pairs of icy-blue eyes and the name Naboredisley. He felt a little disoriented.

Chapter 627: Treatment Plan?

Lumian had initially theorized the presence of multiple Demons on Hanth Island, specifically the sealed blood-colored Demon and the ice-blue-eyed Demon. However, to his astonishment, he discovered various ice-blue-eyed Demons—in the cathedral!

How many Demons inhabit this island?

Are they all part of the same family with ice-blue eyes?

As expected of the Mother of All Things. Even a Demon can be Her child. A whole nest of them!

...

As thoughts swirled in Lumian's mind, accompanied by those piercing ice-blue eyes and the name Naboredisley, he felt that his previous investigations and speculations were completely off course.

The complexity and mystery surrounding the legend of the Demons on Hanth Island surpassed his initial imagination.

No, there are still gains and benefits...

Speculation involves bold assumptions and careful confirmation. It's normal for initial assumptions to be overturned. The elimination method is a crucial deduction tool...

How can there be unsolved cases that are guessed completely correct from the beginning? The crucial aspect lies in consistently refuting the incorrect path through falsification and integrating new information acquired during the investigation to uncover the right one...

Heh heh, if I were to take the Reader pathway, it should be relatively straightforward for me to act the role of a Detective. Discerning a conspiracy stands out as one of the primary duties of a Detective...

Lumian reassured himself, disentangling from the impact of the two ice-blue-eyed Demons. He regained his clarity and rationality, no longer feeling befuddled and disoriented.

Under the blistering sunlight, he swiftly identified an issue.

In the scene I witnessed through the Mystery Prying Glasses, the blood-colored Demon was pulled by an invisible force, but there was only one invisible force, and only a pair of ice-blue eyes gazed at me...

There's only one ice-blue-eyed Demon closely linked to the blood-colored Demon, and that's the elder Boselli who repented before the Sacred Emblem of Life. The others, including the ice-blue-eyed clergyman, are its descendants. Could they be the offspring it left behind with the nuns when it used the Hanth Island's cloister to 'restore its youth' and obtain a new identity?

However, when the ice-blue-eyed clergyman mentioned Boselli, it didn't sound like it was referring to its father, grandfather, or ancestor. It was as if it was discussing a friend with whom it didn't share an amicable relationship...
Moreover, it also identifies itself as Naboredisley...
Could this be a family name? A significant family name among the Abyss Demons?
Puzzled, Lumian boarded the Berries and returned to his first-class suite.
At that moment, Lugano and Ludwig were relishing a lavish lunch.
Upon spotting Lumian, the Doctor grinned sheepishly and said, "I thought you'd be indulging in the local delights on the island, so I didn't wait for you."
Lumian sat down and grabbed a wheat-flavored bun. As he chewed, he asked thoughtfully,
"What do you know about the abilities of the Planter pathway?"
Lugano hesitated for a moment before truthfully responding, "Sequence 9 Planter significantly boosts my strength. I can predict the weather to a certain extent by observing clouds, wind, and other natural phenomena. I'm adept at identifying seeds and nurturing them. Farming tools suit me more than knives and guns.
"Sequence 8 Doctor's primary abilities revolve around healing. They can discern the patient's specific situation through Spirit Vision. They possess outstanding surgical skills, such as suturing severed limbs and transplanting internal organs. Additionally, we gain Beyonder abilities like Evil Ailment Treatment, Trauma Treatment, Soul Suture, and Life-Giving.
"As far as I know, the next Sequence is called Harvest Priest. It mainly focuses on promoting the reproduction and growth of creatures and bringing about a bumper harvest with Beyonder powers..."
Upon hearing this, Lumian suddenly interrupted Lugano.
"Soul Suture?
"How is this implemented?"
Lugano grinned sheepishly and said, "I haven't really used this ability yet. It's used to treat soul injuries. As you know, some superpowers can attack the soul, making it difficult for it to heal on its own. At this moment, as long as the injured let go of their bodies and minds and don't resist, I can carry out a soul-level surgery to stitch up the corresponding wound."
Lumian's concern wasn't about stitching up a soul; it was another matter that provided him with a fresh perspective on the Demon legends of Hanth Island.

He downed the pre-meal bun and took a sip of the golden liqueur. After a moment of contemplation, he inquired, "Since you can suture souls, from a different standpoint, can you also sever souls?"

Lugano fell silent. After ten to twenty seconds, he responded, "Theoretically, yes, but it requires the corresponding person to completely open up their body and mind, leaving their soul unprotected. It would be even more effective if their physical body doesn't exist."

The Doctor hesitated for a moment before adding, "This can serve as an attack on the soul, but it could also be a treatment method. If a patient's soul is corrupted by a curse, they can address it by severing the depravity and allowing their soul to gradually heal."

Upon hearing this, Lumian smiled and applauded softly.

"Well said. Well said."

Lugano, being thick-skinned, couldn't help but feel a bit embarrassed by the praise. He blurted out, "That's just my speculation. I haven't tested it yet."

Lumian ignored him and proceeded to emulate what Ludwig had done. He forked a lamb chop onto his plate and began cutting with determination.

Simultaneously, the initial sensations when he faced the onslaught of the ice-blue-eyed Demon resurfaced in Lumian's mind.

He witnessed diverse versions of himself—a version brimming with hatred, another immersed in pain, one engrossed in lust, and another consumed by various desires and emotions...

As Lugano detailed the process of suturing and soul-severing, an idea sparked in Lumian's mind.

What if the High-Sequence abilities of the Planter pathway were employed to excise different aspects of the soul corresponding to various desires?

Could there truly be just one ice-blue-eyed Demon on Hanth Island, but its soul had been partitioned by the Saints and even Angels of the Church of Earth Mother, each becoming an individual? On a mystical level, they remain a single entity. Hence, is there only one invisible force closely tied to the blood-colored Demon?

The question now is—why would the Church of Earth Mother undertake such an action?

Imposing restrictions or offering protection? Perhaps both?

Lumian swiftly linked this with the state of the blood-colored Demon. It consistently descended into the pitch-black sewage before being hoisted up by an unseen force.

Splitting the soul acted as a shield for the ice-blue Demon,

preventing corruption from the power of the pitch-black sewage?
Wait, could the ice-blue-eyed Demon be the untainted segment of the blood-colored Demon's soul? Is the Church of Earth Mother's approach based on deeming the entire body beyond salvation, but parts are still considered healthy? Is that why a healthy soul needs to be severed into different desires?
The forest sealing off the mysterious valley, pitch-black sewage, and the blood-colored Demon displayed characteristics of rebirth, growth, depravity, death, and rebirth again... The soul fragments of the blood-colored Demon were given new life, enabling them to utilize the cycle of rebirth, growth, aging, death, and rebirth again to resist the corruption spreading from their true bodies?
Simultaneously, relying on the existence of the healthy parts prevented the blood-colored Demon from sinking entirely?
Aging soul fragments are inherently more vulnerable to corruption from the main body, and newborns are the healthiest. This explains why the old Boselli and the ice-blue-eyed clergyman are in different states...
Such a newborn possesses a Demon's potent soul, but its human body is exceedingly frail. Yes, it aligns with my observations of Boselli. Its feeble and aged body encases a potent soul teeming with malevolence... This... This method of sealing and rescuing aligns with the Church of Earth Mother's unique abilities...
With these revelations, Lumian felt enlightened. Only then did he realize that he had been continuously cutting the lamb chop's bones, producing a grinding sound.
Lugano pretended not to notice or hear anything, focusing on enjoying his meal. Ludwig paid no attention to such trivial matters, wholly absorbed in the delicacies.
Lumian withdrew his gaze and happily poured himself a glass of Paha red wine. The confusion, disorder, loss, and disappointment he had previously experienced dissipated significantly.
As he drank, he leisurely pondered, This hypothesis aligns most with the current details. Unfortunately, it can't be verified, nor do I dare to. And without verification and results, there's no feedback for the potion's digestion...
Forget it. The experience and lessons I gained this time are much more important than the digestion I can still attempt in the future.
Why does the Church of Earth Mother want to protect the blood-colored Demon? Moreover, since a healthy soul has been separated and given new life, why not completely destroy and purify the corrupted true form to eliminate any hidden dangers?
There's a high chance that this involves the world's deep secrets...

Is that blood-colored Demon the true and largest Naboredisley?

Was the one seeking a deal to slay Hanth Island's Demon descendant it? Can it, in turn, affect a few soul fragments, allowing me and a Mid-Sequence Beyonder like Franca to slay a true Demon?

The more Lumian contemplated, the more curious he became about the truth. However, he eventually restrained himself.

For Beyonders at his level, this matter was concluded. After leaving Hanth Island, he would report his gains and speculations to Madam Magician and consult the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card holders.

Lumian, putting aside his investigative thoughts, felt a sense of relief. He spent the rest of his time leisurely strolling through Port Hanth.

To his surprise, he realized that the Berserk Sea island city, far from the Feynapotter Kingdom, didn't have a genuine casino. There were no criminal industries like human trafficking. It was as clean as if it had been purified by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

After engaging in Fighting Evil and other card games throughout the afternoon, Lumian, with wins and losses not exceeding 1 gold risot, finally grasped the reason.

Unable to control themselves, the ice-blue-eyed Demons prioritized the malevolent wrongdoers, making them vanish into the forest outside the city.

As time—a century or two—elapsed, Port Hanth could be deemed a city bathed in sunlight.

Certainly, there were innocents among them, like Antonio Elias.

Late at night, in the first-class cabin suite of the Berries.

In his slumber, Lumian vaguely witnessed the land shrouded in sulfurous flames, and the blood-colored Demon sprawled within the pitch-black liquid.

Chapter 628: Terrifying Dream

Lumian vaguely noticed bubbles emerging from the pitch-black liquid enveloping most of the blood-colored Demon's body. The brownish-green hue of the bubbles resembled tree warts.

In an instant, the bubbles burst, reflecting brilliant colors as they merged with the pitch-black liquid.

For some reason, Lumian sensed that something was wrong. He wished to shut his eyes and avoid these details, but trapped in a dream, he had no control.

In the depths of the pitch-black liquid, a figure lurked. It raised its head slightly, gazing at the blood-colored Demon.

Moist brownish-green or light brown tree warts protruded from the figure's body, reminding Lumian of Susanna Mattise in her Fallen Tree Spirit state.

The distinction lay in Susanna Mattise's tree warts, branches, and flower buds growing from her body, melding with her original form. The figure's tree warts, however, seemed to pierce out flamboyantly from the flesh and internal organs, tainted with blood.

In his dream, Lumian instinctively raised his right hand, wiping the corners of his eyes. The back of his hand was stained red.

At some point, blood had flowed from his eyes, turning his vision a blurry red.

The figure's overall outline appeared in the blur.

As if grown on a brownish-green tree, pierced by branches, overrun by tree warts, and covered in flower buds, dripping with a viscous liquid.

A burning sensation engulfed Lumian's chest, prompting him to instinctively close his eyes in the dream.

Yet, he was a step too slow.

Bang!

Lumian's eyes exploded, flooding his mind with searing pain.

He jolted awake, curling up in agony. His hands instinctively reached for his eyes, encountering a flat, sticky, and moist substance. The scent of blood hung heavily in the air.

As an Ascetic accustomed to severe injuries, Lumian took several minutes to overcome the pain that threatened to render him unconscious.

Struggling to sit up, he opened his eyes, only to be met with absolute darkness.

No crimson moonlight, no outlines of furniture in the bedroom--he couldn't see a thing.

Lumian raised his hand once more, gently touching his eye

sockets. Both eyeballs had deflated, shattered beyond repair.
Is it because I glimpsed something I shouldn't have? Lumian chuckled in self-deprecation.
It was a vision from a dream, something he never wished to witness.
Upon reflection, he realized that if Mr. Fool's seal hadn't triggered or Termiboros hadn't activated it, his eyes might not have been the only casualties.
Wiping the tip of his nose, Lumian felt moistness and caught the unmistakable scent of rust.
In a surprisingly good mood, he quipped, "Luckily, it seems what's flowing down is blood, not brain matter."
He rejoiced in surviving the ordeal.
Despite the tragic state of his head, Lumian's body remained relatively unharmed, albeit a bit drained.
Gripping the edge of the bed, Lumian pulled himself up. In a state of blindness and impaired smell, he relied on the Hunter's instinct, navigating through his turf with a mental map. Bypassing furniture, he reached the living room and knocked on the servant's door.
"Yes, what's the matter?" Startled, Lugano hastily opened the door, dressed in a cotton shirt and underpants that served as makeshift pajamas, fearing a repeat of the terrifying encounter with Father Montserrat.
Under the crimson moonlight, he saw Lumian's blood-streaked face and empty blood-red eyes filled with shattered fragments.
"Wh-what happened?" Lugano stammered, bewildered.
Who had beaten his employer to such a state?
Who could inflict such harm upon his employer?
Why not teleport away from this perilous situation?
Lumian calmly pointed at his eyes.
"Treat them."
"Alright," Lugano responded subconsciously, then added awkwardly, "With the eyeballs in such a state, there's no way of treatment. We can only find a suitable transplant."
Lumian, enduring the pain, calmly stated, "No need. Just stop the bleeding and ease the pain."
"Alright." Lugano didn't dare argue, following his employer's instructions. He extended his shimmering left palm.
Upon contact and a simple use of a scalpel, Lumian felt a refreshing sensation in his eyes. The pain became more bearable, though his vision remained absent.
"You can go back to sleep," Lumian waved dismissively, as if his loss of vision was inconsequential. With one hand in his pocket,

he strolled past the Dutanese textbook on the carpet, settled into a recliner, and rocked it gently.
Lugano watched in confusion and anxiety for a while before attempting to return to bed, unable to fall asleep.
When the morning sun bathed the sea's edge, the Doctor abruptly rose from his bed, deciding to grab a cup of coffee for a pick-me-up.
Upon leaving the room, he witnessed his employer in motion. Lumian's green eyes sparkled, showing no signs of injury.
"Y-you're alright?" Lugano was bewildered.
Lumian responded with a radiant smile, "That's right."
"..." Lugano was momentarily speechless.
How did my employer regenerate his eyeballs?
What kind of monster is this...
Is my role as his doctor merely to stop the bleeding and relieve the pain?
Lumian paid no heed to the servant's psychological turmoil. He returned to the master bedroom, drew back the curtains, laid out the paper, and picked up a dark-black fountain pen.
I'm still not cautious enough... He sighed suddenly.
After heeding the ice-blue-eyed Demons' warning and preparing to depart Hanth Island with the Berries, Lumian refrained from promptly writing to Madam Magician. He intended to observe the aftermath and wait until they were safely away from the port.
Unexpectedly, he had experienced such a terrifying and dangerous dream last night!
Initially suspecting that a Demon with ice-blue eyes had lost control and covertly influenced him, Lumian later speculated that he might have been subtly corrupted when he observed the blood-colored Demon and the pitch-black liquid through the Mystery Prying Glasses. The corruption lay dormant until he slept, manifesting fully in his dream.
Focusing his thoughts, he detailed everything witnessed and heard on Hanth Island. He replaced the name Naboredisley with the term Love Incantation.
Concluding the letter, Lumian wrote sincerely, "Perhaps I've encountered too many Demons recently. I feel like I've accumulated too much corruption and want to undergo treatment."
Following that, Lumian conducted a ritual, summoning the doll messenger, and handed over the folded letter.
Accepting the letter with its right hand, the doll messenger covered its nose with its left palm and exclaimed, "You stepped on the world's stinkiest thing!

"It stinks! It stinks!
"So dirty, so dirty!"
Swiftly grasping the letter between two fingers, the doll messenger vanished from the room.
Lumian waited briefly, but with no immediate response from Madam Magician, he decided to seek "treatment" elsewhere.
His destination was the cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother in Port Hanth, where he had visited the day before.
In the early morning, before the commencement of work, numerous believers gathered to listen to the preaching.
The preacher, the ice-blue-eyed clergyman from yesterday, expounded on a specific doctrine from the Holy Scripture. The concept that good and evil emanated from the same source, making them inseparable, was discussed. The sermon emphasized promoting good and suppressing evil.
Isn't it a little ironic to have this coming from a Demon like you? Lumian criticized and sat in the first row, listening casually.
He soon sensed the cathedral's vibrant vitality. Vegetation flourished, and mushrooms quietly sprouted. The scent of wheat and milk provided a calming atmosphere.
Unconsciously, Lumian realized that his life had gained intensity.
Each of the orthodox Churches has its own merits... he sighed silently.
After five to six minutes, the ice-blue-eyed clergyman concluded his preaching and approached Lumian with a warm smile.
"Young people who are willing to listen to advice always have a bright future.
"Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"
Lumian observed the ice-blue-eyed clergyman retracting his raised hands. Is he hinting that it's "satisfied" that I stopped inquiring, exploring the forest, and searching for someone with ice-blue eyes since noon yesterday? Lumian considered, then looked at the clergyman before speaking.
"However, I had a terrifying dream last night and nearly died from it."
"What dream?" the ice-blue-eyed clergyman inquired warmly.
"Bishop, how should I address you?" Lumian asked, deferring from providing an immediate answer.
"Newman," the ice-blue-eyed clergyman announced its name in human society.
Lumian briefly recounted the blood-colored Demon in his dream, the pitch-black liquid, the blurry figure, and the branches and tree warts. He didn't delve into the final injuries he had suffered.
Bishop Newman listened quietly, gazing at Lumian for a few

seconds.
"Are you willing to listen to my preaching?"
"Sure," Lumian agreed, curious about what the Ice-blue-eyed Demon had to say.
Newman flipped open the Holy Bible in his arms and spoke in a magnetic voice, "There are two Abysses. One is material, and the entrance is somewhere in the real world. The other is spiritual, and the entrance is deep in everyone's hearts.
"Sometimes, these two Abysses are separated, but most of the time, they're one.
"Good intentions and evil intentions come from the same source. It's inevitable for us to harbor evil thoughts like jealousy, hatred, destruction, greed, harm, and arrogance. This is normal, not sinful.
"However, if we act on jealousy, hatred, greed, and arrogance, killing someone—our souls will gradually sink into the Abyss.
"When the time comes, one can only repent to the Mother, just like this.
"Merciful Mother, I have fallen into the Abyss of evil..."
Lumian listened quietly, grasping the essence of Bishop Newman's words.
He acknowledged his mistake rooted in arrogance.
His earlier ventures, marked by a proactive approach and a lack of major problems, had led him to underestimate the concealed perils of high-level matters.
Standing up, Lumian raised his hands.
"I understand. Praise the Earth, praise the Mother of All Things!"
Newman nodded in satisfaction.
Returning to the Berries, Lumian read the reply, neatly folded into a square.
The letter contained spirit world coordinates and a concise directive: "Put an end to the matter on Hanth Island. Find time to seek treatment here."

Chapter 629: Corruption Removal

Madam Magician had not confirmed Lumian's speculation or delved into the deeper truth of Hanth Island's Demon legends. Lumian realized that this likely involved something he shouldn't pry into at the moment, or perhaps it was best not to understand until the accumulated corruption was eliminated.

Does "find time" imply that I can go whenever I want, disregarding the healer's schedule? Has Madam Magician foreseen that there won't be any issues? Lumian clutched the paper with the spirit world's coordinates and activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

His figure vanished from the Berries, navigating through the swirling chaos of colors. Occasionally, he felt inexplicable gazes and caught glimpses of indescribable forms.

After an unknown period, Lumian arrived at the location corresponding to the spirit world's coordinates and stepped out.

Before him stood a towering dome, illuminated by bright glass windows, with a mural depicting an epic scene.

In the midst of the hall, Lumian noticed a ball of sunlight.

Realization struck, prompting him to approach.

As he walked, the sunlight seemed to "spread" over, banishing shadows and darkness wherever it touched.

Soon, Lumian found himself enveloped in the sunlight.

Suddenly, it felt as if pure sunlight pierced through his skin, flesh, bones, and internal organs, exposing his soul.

Bits of illusory black gas were expelled from his soul by the sunlight, portraying various of Lumian's expressions--ferocious, pained, pleading, or intimidating.

Within seconds, the black gas dissipated under the purifying sunlight.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt his heart throb, and his left chest burned.

The blazing sunlight appeared to expel and purify everything in its path.

Amidst the agonizing heartache, Lumian sensed a change in the seal on his left chest, as if it was concealing itself, synchronizing with the sunlight.

However, before the attempt could fully succeed, the sunlight took the initiative to stop, receding like a tide into the depths of the hall.

Lumian swiftly returned to his usual state. Aside from the lingering discomfort in his heart, he felt significantly more at ease, as if he had suddenly caught the morning breeze and

glimpsed the sunrise after an extended period of oppressive darkness.
His attention was drawn to a tall man in a simple white robe standing in the depths of the hall.
Observing the man, Lumian estimated him to be around 22 or 23 years old, towering at over two meters with an imposing aura. Despite his height, he exuded a calm temperament, and his brownish-yellow hair was neatly styled.
"The residual corruption on you has been cleared," the tall man spoke in ancient Feysac.
Lumian had a suspicion and inquired, "Are you Mr. Sun?"
"Yes," the young and tall man responded politely, devoid of arrogance or impatience.
He's actually so young, but one can't judge his age from his appearance... Lumian expressed his gratitude without delving into further questions.
Indicating towards the hall's exit, Lumian asked, "Can I go out for a walk?"
Though unaware of his location, the murals suggested it was an essential cathedral of the Church of The Fool.
Lumian deduced that the Major Arcana card holder, The Sun, held a prominent position in the Church, or perhaps even the top position.
"Sure." Major Arcana The Sun nodded.
Observing the Church of The Fool's etiquette, Lumian pressed his hand to his chest and bowed before turning to exit the hall.
Once outside, the world teemed with life. Voices and figures surrounded him.
His initial thought: Did I accidentally step into a land of giants?
The shortest individuals on the street were at least 1.89 meters tall, with occasional figures reaching three to four meters. Clad in white shirts, black trench coats, and half top hats, the men carried canes resembling spears, emitting an inexplicable sense of absurdity.
Even the ladies matched the towering height, mostly opting for flexibility in long pants rather than skirts.
Lumian surveyed the area, his gaze traversing doors exceeding four meters in height.
For a moment, he fell silent, feeling like a newborn in this peculiar environment.
However, this realization only briefly dampened his mood for exploration.
Of course, it was only a brief moment.
...

Trier, Trocadéro, at the entrance of a grape manor.
Franca clarified to the valet that her purpose was to visit Madame Clarice, and he stepped aside without guiding her. His stance implied that she knew the way and could proceed independently.
Undeterred, Franca followed the path ingrained in her memory, arriving at the circular pavilion nestled among the grape trees.
Demoness of Black Clarice, adorned in a black court dress, was seated there.
"Good morning, Your Excellency Clarice," Franca greeted warmly, openly admiring her beautiful face and slightly sorrowful demeanor.
Demoness of Black Clarice nodded slightly and inquired, "Has there been progress in the Mirror People investigation?"
Franca, not in a rush to respond, met Clarice's dark-gray eyes and remarked, "Is Browns not present?"
"She's not my lady's maid. She attends to her own matters," Demoness of Black Clarice replied succinctly.
"Not at the Red House Café or the hunting ground beside the forest either," Franca observed the air's fragrance and chose to engage in conversation with the Demoness of Black.
"She has other matters to attend to," Clarice evaded delving into Browns' affairs.
Reluctantly, Franca recounted the details of the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny's situation, from the initial sensing of the Mirror World Fragment's tremors after the play, substituting herself as the person involved.
Clarice remained silent, her eyes lowered in contemplation.
Franca didn't rush the Demoness of Black. Her gaze flickered between the deep gray of her eyes, the fairness of her delicate skin, the curves that stirred the soul, and the unnaturally alluring red lips.
She knew this wasn't a good idea, but she couldn't rein in her impulses. Her heart gradually heated up, and her thoughts got a bit muddled. Her mouth dried, forcing her to purse her lips intermittently.
Dammit! *Why am I feeling this way right now?* While humans as animals can be susceptible to instincts, I've always maintained composure during serious discussions and encounters with high-ranking figures. At most, I've held admiration... Could it be that the Demoness of Black is intentionally radiating her charm to draw me in? Or is there another explanation? Yes, the lingering corruption from the Demon incident must be affecting me! Though it's subtle and doesn't manifest in my daily life, it's making it difficult for me to control my desires in the presence of a high-

ranking Demoness known for her feminine allure. As a result, I find myself slipping into an aroused state... Franca gritted her teeth, refusing to succumb to the temptations of desire.
Clarice looked up at her.
"Has it been too long since you've experienced pleasure?"
"Not since my last lover passed away," Franca replied truthfully, aware that the Demoness of Black referred to a specific kind of pleasure. She explained, "As I mentioned earlier, to get close to Moran Avigny's illegitimate daughter, I used a mystical item. Unfortunately, it had a side effect, leading to encounters with Demons and other evil entities for a transaction. I was somewhat affected."
Clarice's voice turned icy.
"Endurance is not a sustainable solution. Indulge yourself. Otherwise, the Demon pathway will become your nemesis."
The Demoness of Black's aura instantly shifted to a holy and dignified state, becoming inviolable.
Franca also sensed that she couldn't entertain lascivious thoughts about such a captivating beauty. Her desires gradually subsided, and her mind cleared, breaking free from her aroused state.
Clarice redirected the conversation.
"You aim to deal with Moran Avigny?"
"He should be a crucial Mirror Person. If we can capture him or channel his spirit, we should uncover most of the Mirror People hidden in Trier. Madame, I seek your assistance," Franca stated, laying out her thoughts.
She avoided mentioning that Moran Avigny shared Clarice's dark-gray eyes and instead presented a color photo.
Clarice nodded slightly and said, "You can now strategize your operation. I'll assist during crucial moments, but for most scenarios, you must rely on yourself and the factions under your control."
"No problem." Franca didn't conceal her excitement.
As she exited the vine-surrounded circular pavilion, Demoness of Black Clarice's dark-gray eyes turned cold as she rose slowly.
...
In a brightly lit bar, Lumian clinked a beer glass, larger than his head, against the nearly three-meter-tall "giant" opposite him and gulped down the golden liquor.
Wiping the corners of his mouth, he chuckled.
"So, this is the New City of Silver in the Bible."
From the sermons he had heard, Lumian knew that the New City of Silver served as the headquarters of the Church of The Fool, situated in the Sonia Sea. It had been established by the surviving

humans rescued by Gehrman Sparrow from the cursed continent of the Forsaken Land of the Gods.
Unexpectedly, the surviving humans were towering figures, almost like giants!
"That's right. All the warriors here are ready to defend Mr. Fool's Church at all times!" the nearly three-meter-tall giant expressed with satisfaction. "You're not bad. You worship the Angel of Redemption and believe in Mr. Fool. Just these two points alone makes us brothers!"
He extended his right palm and slapped Lumian, nearly toppling him. It felt like a child encountering a brown bear's paw.
Lumian forced a smile and inquired, "Can you share more about the Angel of Redemption's deeds in the Forsaken Land of the Gods?"

Chapter 630: Day Tour

The nearly three-meter-tall giant expressed regret, "The six-member council mandates that we can't discuss matters not mentioned in the Holy Bible. As a believer of Mr. Fool, you must be familiar with the sermons and official statements. I can't share anything beyond that, just as I can't claim to have personally seen the Angel of Redemption and received his assistance."

Attempting to tap Lumian on the shoulder, the "giant" found Lumian deftly dodging the gesture.

"How should I address you?" Lumian, feigning reverence, inquired, not fully convinced.

The "giant" responded, "Livalie.

"A toast to the newborn of the City of Silver!"

Lumian raised his massive beer glass, clinking it against the other party's. Then, he downed the remaining golden liquid.

Rubbing his bulging stomach, he gestured towards the washroom, indicating his need to relieve himself.

The beer in the New City of Silver wasn't extraordinary, but the cups were simply too large. After two glasses, Lumian's physique and alcohol tolerance reached their limit.

He wasn't drunk; he was just stuffed!

Entering the washroom, Lumian stood before one of the urinals, unbuckling his belt and narrowing his eyes.

Amidst the splashing sounds, a "giant" more than three meters tall entered and chose the urinal beside him.

Lumian subconsciously turned his head before slowly retracting his gaze.

Dazed, he stared at the wall in front of him until the pressure in his abdomen completely subsided. Only then did he leave the washroom, returning to his usual seat at the bar counter.

Livalie had already ordered a new glass of beer for Lumian. It was dark-black but not murky. Swirling in the mug, it revealed a hint of brown.

"Try it. It's a specialty of the New City of Silver, Black-Faced Beer!" the "giant," firmly believing himself to be human, introduced enthusiastically.

"Black-Faced Beer?" Lumian, holding the beer glass larger than his head, asked in puzzlement.

Livalie suddenly felt a pang of sadness.

"The Forsaken Land of the Gods lacked the sun and fertile soil. Only Black-Faced Grass grew. It was our staple, sustaining generations of City of Silver residents. Though always insufficient, it was better than nothing.

"Back then, brewing alcohol from Black-Faced Grass was impossible. It was too, too extravagant.
"Heh heh, now with food, meat, and milk in abundance, I've grown taller again. I'm 30 centimeters taller than before."
"Can Black-Faced Grass still be planted in the New City of Silver? Grown underground?" Although Lumian wasn't a Planter, having grown up in the countryside, he knew that in extreme environments, those plants might not survive under normal circumstances.
Livalie smiled.
"It can be planted! It can grow in any environment. Of course, we've had someone modify the Black-Faced Grass seeds to make them more suitable for the current conditions. Its texture is actually quite different from before. Even more flavorful. Give it a try. You won't find this beer elsewhere. We don't grow much ourselves. It's mainly to remember the past."
Lumian raised the beer glass to his lips with interest, taking a large gulp.
The first thing he tasted was the normal, faint fragrance of wheat. Then, he experienced a refreshing grass-like stimulation in the sweet alcohol. Finally, a subtle milky taste filled his mouth.
"Not bad. It's a special and wonderful experience." Lumian was generous with his praise.
Curious, he inquired, "Do you have any liquor brewed from Black-Faced Grass?"
Livalie's expression darkened as he shook his head.
"We in the New City of Silver consider alcoholism debased, indulgent, and a waste of food. That's why we reject liquor."
At this point, he paused.
"Besides, Black-Faced Grass doesn't seem suitable for brewing. Even if it's made into beer, drinking too much will cause hallucinations. I can only handle three glasses at a time."
Minor toxicity? In the Forsaken Land of the Gods, people from the New City of Silver relied on eating this plant to survive generation after generation. It wasn't easy... Lumian recalled his sister's occasional jokes and smirked.
"If you drink too much, will you see a group of little people dancing?"
Livalie pondered for a moment and replied, "No, hallucinations are usually different. Some see their wives slapping them, some hear the cries of their deceased relatives, and some find a baby lying by the roadside wailing..."
Lumian couldn't bear to hear about matters involving babies crying, so he lost interest and focused on the taste of the Black-

Faced Beer.
After finishing the glass, he made another trip to the washroom before leaving the bar. He planned to take advantage of the afternoon sun to stroll around New Silver City and teleport back to the Berries docked at Port Hanth in the evening.
In the sparsely populated yet unusually towering buildings, half-giants roamed. Every now and then, one or two "giants" standing over three meters tall could be spotted. Those below 1.8 meters were a rarity, except for those with child-like faces.
Lumian's stature barely met the criteria, and his eyes quickly scanned the surroundings.
He observed turquoise vines snaking up the outer walls of certain houses. On these vines, numerous soft, large, white, and plump mushrooms thrived.
Mushrooms? Since when did vines yield mushrooms? Lumian furrowed his brow, questioning his botanical knowledge.
It occurred to him that this might be a unique plant brought from the Forsaken Land of the Gods by the New City of Silver, bringing a sense of relief.
He approached a roadside stall and glanced up.
"You're selling milk. Why don't I see a bucket of milk?"
The vendor, standing at 2.56 meters with slightly grayish-blue skin, smiled genuinely and replied, "The house behind me is mine. Want some milk?"
"I'll take a glass." Lumian, having already inquired, had no qualms about purchasing a glass of milk; money was not an issue.
Though verl d'or and gold risot weren't official currency in the New City of Silver, gold held value universally.
The vendor cheerfully grabbed a cup, turned around, and headed to his two-story house. He reached out and plucked a soft, white mushroom.
He aimed the mushroom at the cup and squeezed it.
Milk-white liquid gushed out, rapidly filling the cup.
Lumian's jaw dropped, confusion once again clouding his eyes.
This is what you guys call milk?
"It's ready." The half-giant vendor handed the milk to Lumian.
Lumian instinctively took it and asked in bewilderment, "Are those mushrooms?"
"Yes, milk mushrooms," the half-giant vendor replied earnestly.
You call that mushrooms? Lumian paid in a daze and left the stall with a cup in hand.
He couldn't recall how much he paid or even why he started the conversation about buying milk.
After walking more than ten meters, he brought the cup to his lips

and took a sip.
It tasted like milk!
Lumian finished the glass with a frown, finding nothing peculiar.
Yet, the liquid came from mushrooms!
Just consider it a unique plant... Just consider it a unique plant... Lumian muttered, deciding not to try it again.
He feared that drinking too much might turn him into a milk producer himself!
He continued to wander aimlessly along streets twice as wide as those in Port Hanth.
Suddenly, another "half-giant" with slightly grayish-blue skin approached, holding a thick book and speaking with unusual enthusiasm, "My friend, would you be interested in hearing me introduce our beacon and savior..."
Lumian smiled, pressed his hand to his chest, and bowed.
"Praise The Fool!"
"Ah, a brother." The half-giant was both disappointed and delighted.
The two of them conversed in ancient Feysac, but Lumian had overheard New City of Silver residents occasionally speaking Jotun, a language that could stir supernatural powers.
"Are there usually foreigners here?" Lumian asked casually.
The half-giant smiled and replied, "We often have foreigners visiting, exploring, and sightseeing. In the early years, some chose to settle here, but most eventually moved away. Living with us proved challenging for them. Heh heh, we're too tall and not well-versed in the pleasures of life."
With that, the half-giant took something from his pocket and handed it to Lumian.
"I'm pleased to have you as a guest in the New City of Silver. Try our locally made candy."
It was a candy wrapped in thin blue-white paper.
Lumian didn't hesitate. He took it, tore off the wrapping, and popped the white candy into his mouth.
The rich milky aroma and smooth sweetness quickly unfolded on his tongue, creating a delightful experience.
Milk flavor... Lumian's curiosity sparked as he inquired with a peculiar expression, "Is this milk candy?"
"Yes," the proselytizing half-giant replied with a smile.
"What kind of milk did you use?" Lumian hadn't anticipated ever asking such a question.
The half-giant replied naturally, "Milk from the milk mushrooms."
"..." Lumian held the milk candy in his mouth, torn between spitting it out or swallowing it.

He sensed the genuine warmth and enthusiasm when the other party shared the milk candy.
As time passed, Lumian witnessed mushrooms with a cooked meat fragrance, mushrooms smelling like fish, and various peculiar mushrooms.
His gaze turned lost as he observed the half-giants and giants joyfully sharing their food.
Unconsciously, he arrived at a corner of the New City of Silver.
A towering building stood there.
It was split into two sections. On the left, a spire tower; on the right, a domed tower. The outer wall, standing 30 to 40 meters tall, was a grayish-white hue.
The Twin Towers? According to Livalie, the spire houses the library and other public facilities, while the domed tower serves as the council office for the ruling six-member council of the New City of Silver... There must be Sealed Artifacts and formidable individuals in such a place... Lumian stood nearby, examining the imposing structure before him.
His eyes moved across the domed tower and noticed black plants resembling hair growing from the cracks near the ground. They hung there, swaying occasionally in the wind.
Lumian diverted his attention and headed towards the spire, eager to explore the books passed down in the New City of Silver, a human settlement existing in the Forsaken Land of the Gods for thousands of years.

Chapter 631: Devilogy

The steeple's base was paved with black stone bricks, and a colossal pillar rose proudly. Lumian felt like a visitor in a giant's kingdom as he strode through the expansive and dimly lit space. The occasional tall residents who effortlessly towered over him only heightened this impression.

Guided by the signs on the wall, he ascended to the third floor, revealing rows of imposing bookshelves.

The custodian of the library, an elderly man draped in a linen robe, oversaw the space.

Even seated, he matched Lumian's height, and his slightly gray skin bore the marks of age.

Engrossed in a goatskin-bound book, the library administrator paid no heed to Lumian's entrance, his gaze firmly fixed on the text.

Lumian, not rushing to seek permission for his exploration, entered the library and followed the guidelines posted on each row of bookshelves leading to the section housing mythical books.

He ran his finger over the weathered leather-bound book and another with freshly copied pages, choosing a tome that chronicled creation myths.

Before the bookshelf, Lumian casually flipped through its pages, only to stuff the book back.

He couldn't comprehend it!

The words were in Jotun!

This ancient language, associated with the Beyonder race of giants, possessed the ability to manipulate the forces of nature. Ranked alongside Dragonese, Elvish, and ancient Hermes, Jotun held significant importance in mysticism.

Although Lumian had mastered ancient Hermes and Hermes, Jotun remained a language he recognized but hadn't fully mastered. He could barely decipher the title of the ancient book but couldn't comprehend its contents.

A sweep of his gaze revealed a corresponding copy of the ancient book, this time written in ancient Feysac—a human language devoid of supernatural influence.

Joy surged within Lumian as he retrieved the soft-covered book and settled into the reading area near the window.

Throughout the entire process, no one intervened or issued a warning.

<nulli>This library is entirely open to everyone. Even those not residing in the New City of Silver can peruse its contents, but borrowing seems to be off the table? Or perhaps, the knowledge on

this level isn't deemed confidential, Lumian mused, maintaining a steady pace.
He strolled past the section dedicated to Beyonder creatures, and his keen eyes snagged a book titled "Devilology."
<nulli>Devilology... Recalling recent encounters, Lumian snagged the corresponding copy.
In the reading area, he chose a spot shielded from direct sunlight yet bathed in ample illumination. Seated, he delved into the pages of "Devilology."
As he read, Lumian's eyes widened, and his mouth hung slightly ajar.
He murmured to himself, <nulli>Is it really acceptable to have this kind of knowledge available to the public?
Each piece of information was invaluable!
The "Devilology" book meticulously outlined the traits and behaviors of creatures from various species after transforming into Devils. It also provided detailed analyses of Devils with distinct personalities within the same species.
For those potentially facing Beyonders of the Devil pathway in combat, the value of this book rivaled that of a potent Grade 2 Sealed Artifact or its corresponding mystical item.
<nulli>Moreover, how did the New City of Silver come by such knowledge? It's improbable they could compile creature illustrations without dispatching hundreds of Devils... Could it be that the half-
giants and giants here are Devil Hunters? Perhaps, in ancient times, when Devils were more active, they shared information with other factions? Lumian grew more alarmed as he read on.
Midway through, he massaged his throbbing temples, sensing a rapid depletion of his spirituality.
Lumian temporarily closed "Devilology," intending to explore the creation myths of the New City of Silver and take a well-deserved break.
From the very outset, the creation myth read:
"The omnipotent and omniscient god created everything before slipping into a profound slumber.
"Among the mythical races He brought into being, Giant King Aurmir, Dragon of Imagination Ankewelt, Elf King Soniathrym, Vampire Ancestor Lilith, Devil King Farbauti, Phoenix Ancestor Gregrace, Mutant King Kvastir, and King of Demonic Wolves Flegrea emerged as potent and crazy beings. They partitioned the authority left by the Lord, transforming into ancient deities governing the sky, land, sea, reality, the spirit world, and the astral realm..."

Abruptly, a dull-skinned, slightly gray finger tapped a specific spot on the page.
An aged, raspy voice echoed.
"Do not utter this name in any Beyonder language."
Lumian looked up, surprised to find the library administrator, previously immersed in his books, standing beside him seemingly out of nowhere.
As a Hunter, Lumian remained oblivious!
Partly due to the lingering dizziness from reading "Devilology," it showcased the library administrator's proficiency in concealing both breath and movement, given his towering stature of more than three meters.
Lumian redirected his attention to the name indicated by the library administrator.
"Devil Monarch Farbauti."
Without awaiting Lumian's inquiry, the library administrator, bearing giant-like traits, shifted his finger a few centimeters and remarked, "It's advisable to avoid pronouncing this name in any Beyonder language as well."
Lumian followed the motion of the finger, silently noting the corresponding name in his mind.
"Vampire Ancestor Lilith."
"Why am I not allowed to read about it?" Lumian expressed his ignorance without reservation.
The library administrator spoke in a deep voice, "The Devil Monarch is still alive. This formidable ancient deity remains among the living.
"And the Vampire Ancestor is suspected to be alive as well. In recent times, an individual in the city experienced disturbances after uttering the name 'Lilith' in Jotun. Although their life wasn't at risk, they endured prolonged suffering."
<nulli>Ancient deities? Entities that once governed the world before the Ancient Sun God's era? Lumian recalled fragments of his limited knowledge and inquired thoughtfully, "Did the Ancient Sun God rescue humanity from the dominion of these ancient deities?"
The library administrator, towering at more than three meters, turned to the last page and pointed.
Lumian read the description:
"The omnipotent and omniscient god stirred from slumber, rising from the earth to vanquish the ancient deities and reclaim His authorities.
"Note: In the present era, the omnipotent and omniscient god is also known as the Ancient Sun God..."
<nulli>Indeed... Among the eight ancient deities, Devil Monarch

Farbauti is still alive, Vampire Ancestor Lilith is suspected to be alive, and the rest have perished? Giant King Aurmir... Why does that name sound familiar? Ah, the provincial capital renowned for its red wine and champagne. What ties does it share with the Giant King? Lumian cautiously inquired, "Can these two names be pronounced in ordinary human language?"
"The Vampire Ancestor's is acceptable, but it's advisable to refrain from attempting the Devil Monarch's. You must exercise caution even in writing it," responded the colossal library administrator. "We are uncertain if the Devil Monarch possesses any special abilities."
<nulli>Exercise caution even in writing... Are all Demons like this? Yes, the deity of the Devil pathway remains alive, an ancient being since the Second Epoch... Lumian murmured, his heart stirred. He retrieved a note with the Love Incantation from his Traveler's Bag.
"Have you encountered this name before? I came across a Demon who identified itself as this. Much like the others, it cannot be spoken or written, only thought."
The library administrator accepted the note with a hand capable of engulfing Lumian's head. His gaze swept over the name "Naboredisley."
He lapsed into deep contemplation. After a minute or two, he silently retrieved a copy from a concealed location within the bookshelf.
The book's title read: "A Summary of Rumors and Hearsay Before the Cataclysm (1)"
<nulli>What a simple name... Lumian observed as the library administrator opened the newly-acquired book, pointing at a particular line of text.
"As anticipated, it's right here."
Lumian fixed his gaze and read silently.
"After the Devil Monarch Farbauti led the Devils back to the Abyss, occasional rumors persisted of Demons enticing humans.
"The Demons operated under the following names:
"Beelbubli, Almos, Samael, Lilatan, and Naboredisley.
"A high-ranking Demon Hunter speculated that these names conceal the aliases of Devil Monarch Farbauti..."
<nulli>The Devil Monarch Farbauti's alias? Lumian felt a jolt as a thin layer of sweat coated his back.
<nulli>*Could Naboredisley be the Devil Monarch?*
<nulli>The sealed blood-colored Demon was the Devil Monarch?
<nulli>No, it doesn't seem likely. If it were a genuine ancient deity, catching just a glimpse of His form wouldn't have resulted in my eyes exploding in a dream. I would have lost control

immediately... Yes, perhaps Farbauti's pseudonym is among these names, but it doesn't necessarily mean Naboredisley is Him...
Lumian wiped his forehead with his right hand, forcing a smile as he addressed the library administrator, "As a foreigner, am I truly allowed to read these books? The knowledge they contain is exceedingly precious."
The library administrator responded calmly, "The Chief has already informed us that you are Mr. Fool's Blessed."
"Very well." Lumian found it amusing.
Apparently, not every foreigner could access this library.
The library administrator offered no further warnings. He took the book chronicling pre-Cataclysm rumors and departed from Lumian's vicinity.
Lumian continued to alternate between reading "Devilology" and "Creation Tales," taking breaks as needed.
As evening approached, he barely concluded both books and departed from the Twin Towers.
Releasing his compressed spirituality, Lumian teleported back to the Berries in Port Hanth.
Surveying the still-bright sky, Lumian confirmed that the investigation into Hanth Island's Demon legends had reached its conclusion.
The matter delved into complexities beyond his reach.
He no longer hesitated about his next steps and plans.
Since he hadn't fully digested the Conspirer potion, he resolved to head to West Balam and seek out Hisoka. There, he would hunt to digest the potion and complete the advancement ritual!

Chapter 632: Conspiracy

Late at night, in Trier, AngoulÃªme de François sat in front of a small analyzer and a radio transceiver, attentively listening to the clicks and observing as a "translated" telegram was produced by a mechanical typewriter.

The signature above simply read Hidden Blade.

Having exchanged a few messages, AngoulÃªme remained composed. He picked up the telegram and swiftly skimmed through its contents.

"Um, when you're protecting high-ranking government officials and members of parliament daily, do you tail them even during personal moments like affairs or trips to the washroom?"

A wry smile formed on AngoulÃªme's face. He contemplated responding to Hidden Blade with, "What occupies your thoughts all day?" However, in the blink of an eye, his eyes narrowed as he tapped away on the mechanical typewriter.

"Tell me, what crime do you intend to commit? Which high-ranking government official or member of parliament is your target for assassination?"

Dammit! Franca, seated in the master bedroom of her apartment, squirmed uncomfortably.

Why did it feel like she was undergoing police interrogation?

She dryly chuckled to herself and replied on the mechanical typewriter.

"I'm just curious. Following them would be awkward, and not doing so might expose a security vulnerability easily exploitable by others."

She refused to acknowledge any plans involving the Minister of Industry in the current government.

After a while, 007 sent a new telegram.

"I rarely undertake such missions. Initially, I dealt with Beyonder incidents and battled cultists. Later, I got promoted and no longer had to participate in daily protection operations.

"Based on my knowledge and limited experience, we have to follow the protectee wherever they go. If they choose to have an affair, at least one of us will discreetly stand by the coat rack, keeping a watchful eye. If time allows, we'll investigate and confirm the identity and background of the target in advance. If the protectee enters the washroom, one of us waits by their side, guarding against potential threats from sewers, ventilation pipes, and shadows.

"However, there's an exception. If the protectee strongly requests and writes an exemption, we can respect their privacy. After all,

we're not their parents obligated to protect their every move. If they perish, someone else will take their place. It's not easy to find a three-legged toad, but those aspiring to be high-ranking government officials and members of parliament can fill Avenue du Boulevard. Moreover, such officials and MPs don't often possess exceptional foresight and wisdom. What matters is the position they hold, not the individual.
"Very few high-ranking officials and MPs choose to write exemptions for privacy, but they tend to do so when discussing confidential matters with their team."
007, did you work overtime so much that you harbor resentment?
Franca chuckled inwardly.
She felt that 007 wasn't as laid back as she would have liked. If it were the two members from Loen, they would likely say, "It's fine if most high-ranking officials who don't deal with real matters or MPs who only give speeches are dead. Even curly-haired baboons in their positions would perform better. At least the baboons wouldn't smack their heads to formulate policies or work for personal gain. They wouldn't boast about their wisdom and desire to show off. They'd simply enjoy bananas and play happily. That's the least harmful thing for the entire country."
Franca read 007's telegram again and turned to Jenna, who was sitting by the bed.
"The protective measures are tight, and there are no loopholes to exploit."
"Yes, that's the case with the Purifiers. The Machinery Hivemind and Bureau 8 should be similar."
Franca, Jenna, and Anthony had been gathering information for a while and had devised several plans, but they still found it unsafe and uncertain. Hence, they consulted 007, seeking clarification on the security situation around Moran Avigny.
Being a Cabinet Minister of a country, Moran Avigny was not an easy target for assassination.
Moreover, Franca and the others' primary goal wasn't assassination. Even if they considered it, they had to factor in the time required for spirit channeling, making it even more troublesome.
Listening to Franca's summary of 007's response, Jenna pondered for a moment and said, "If it were any other Demoness, they might choose to sacrifice their established legitimate identity by seducing Moran Avigny and pretending to be shy to make the minister get an exemption from the protectors. However, I don't think that's feasible. Moran Avigny is likely a Mirror Person, and Mirror People have a close relationship with the Demoness pathway. They might

be especially wary of a Demoness approaching them."
Franca had initially hesitated to involve Jenna in the operation against Moran Avigny because the Demoness of Black Clarice would secretly monitor and provide assistance at critical moments. It would be risky if she discovered Jenna using the Demoness pathway's abilities.
However, Jenna insisted on participating. Her reasoning was:
After Franca admitted to Clarice that she hadn't experienced pleasure for a long time, the Demoness of Black would likely suspect her relationship with Franca. After all, Franca had approached Browns Sauron under the guise of attending a female orgy.
Therefore, Jenna wanted to showcase a Vampire's abilities and combat style in front of the Demoness of Black. The mystical item she currently possessed would allow her to disguise herself effectively and maintain sufficient combat strength. The prerequisite was that she had to conceal the Arrow of the Bloodthirsty well and hide it under her clothes. As for Mirror Substitution, she could explain it away with Franca since Anthony had one too.
Franca had muttered, "Demonesses can also have pure love," but as she finished speaking, she awkwardly changed the topic and tacitly allowed Jenna to participate.
"Hmm." Franca, sitting cross-legged, nodded slightly and said, "Moran Avigny's strength is unknown. He might be very formidable. If we attempt to seduce him, we risk becoming his prey if he's vigilant, possibly even losing our lives. Sigh, I'd better write to Lumian and see what he thinks."
Franca chuckled self-deprecatingly.
"Ever since he left Trier, my brain seems to have gone on vacation." She was mocking her past laziness, acknowledging that she often delegated the primary responsibility of thinking to Lumian while playing a supporting role.
Jenna chuckled and said, "You're really good at self-deprecating. That's what I admire most about you. You're open-minded and cheerful."
Franca chuckled.
"Teasing can liven up the atmosphere and foster closer relationships, but sometimes, if you can't gauge others' acceptance, teasing can easily turn into mockery. It's safer to make a self-deprecating remark."
As the two Demonesses conversed, a telegram clattered in. It was still from 007.
Franca's eyes lit up as she read the telegram.

The telegram read:
"Hidden Blade, if you disclose your target and provide sufficient reason, I might be able to offer assistance and discreetly cooperate with your actions."
Wow, what a bro! Franca praised inwardly as her fingers swiftly moved over the mechanical typewriter.
"Here's the deal. I currently possess ample evidence to believe that the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, is a Mirror Person who has infiltrated Trier and assumed the original owner's identity for decades. Haha, I didn't reveal this earlier because I needed to acquire crucial information from Moran Avigny. If he's captured by you, I can't guarantee that you'll gain access to pertinent information, so I plan to take action myself."
"Phew... There's hope!" Franca turned around and joyfully raised her right index and middle fingers to Jenna.
Before long, 007 responded:
"Gather the results of your previous investigations and Moran Avigny's information promptly and place it at the designated contact point. I'll verify it first and find an opportune moment. Await my further instructions."
Franca's face lit up with joy. She pursed her lips and sent a brief telegram:
"It's highly likely that a demigod of the Demoness Sect will be involved in this operation. Exercise caution."
Jenna read it quietly and asked thoughtfully, "Are we still seeking Lumian's opinion?"
"Yes," Franca replied without hesitation. "As the saying goes, 'three smelly cobblers are as good as Roselle.' With more people brainstorming, we may uncover better solutions."
"What kind of proverb is that? Why haven't I heard it before..." Jenna suspected that Franca was making it up.
...
The crimson moon remained unseen, with only the stars casting a faint glow.
Seated in the Berries' first-class suite, Lumian perused Dutanese textbooks when his messenger, Penitent Baynfel, abruptly materialized before him.
Baynfel, draped in a black clergyman's robe, resembling a charred corpse, handed over the letter.
Lumian caught it, inhaling the lingering fragrance on the paper.
Franca's letter... Jenna even held and read it... Lumian made a casual judgment as he observed his messenger curiously.
He had a persistent feeling that Penitent Baynfel harbored many untold stories, but every attempt to engage in conversation was

met with stoic silence.
After Baynfel traversed into the spirit world, Lumian unfolded the letter, reclined in his chair, and leisurely read.
With 007's help, this shouldn't be difficult. Lumian smiled suddenly and whispered to himself, If it doesn't work out, they can force the bait. Focus on the Mirror Person's wariness of Demonesses and the potential strength they possess to lure him. When Moran Avigny believes the target is a bait from the Demoness Sect, with a demigod hiding behind her, planning to take the poison pill and retreat to deliver a bomb, he'll find himself facing one or two Angels, three to five demigods... However, this way, Franca's Demoness Sect mission will be finished...
Lumian's thoughts raced as he crafted and discarded one plan after another.
Tomorrow, the Berries would depart from the Berserk Sea, sailing into the Southern Continent's waters.
When the time came, the ship wouldn't need to navigate complex twists and turns to avoid storms, maelstroms, and mystical phenomena. It could head directly for its destination port in West Balam.
Suddenly, Lumian sensed something and stood up.
Approaching the window, he peered out. In the darkness not far away, an ancient three-masted sailboat sailed silently.
There were no lights on the ship, and no one strolled on the deck.

Chapter 633: West Balam

Lumian had heard from Lugano that ships deviating from the safe sea route might mysteriously disappear. In a few years, they would occasionally appear at night--with no lights or people.

This seemed to be the case now.

In the past, Lumian might have teleported over out of curiosity, taking advantage of the three-masted sailboat's reentry into a safe sea route to assess its internal condition. However, after encountering the Demon legends on Hanth Island, he felt that less curiosity was better. As long as the uninhabited ship traveling in the darkness didn't exhibit signs of attack or an imminent danger, he could treat it as a unique spectacle of the Berserk Sea and simply observe.

The brown ship gradually distanced itself, leaving only the billowing sails in its wake.

Abruptly, Lumian, utilizing his exceptional vision, spotted a face silently staring out of an open hole in the cabin's uppermost window.

The face, shriveled and pale-white, clung tightly to the bones, devoid of flesh and blood. Flaxen-colored hair cascaded like withered weeds. The eyeballs were absent, leaving only a void of deep darkness.

It resembled the head of a desiccated corpse, yet its lips were surprisingly vibrant, as if recently adorned with lipstick.

Lumian instinctively sensed the face belonged to a woman. At least, she had been a woman when alive.

He refrained from raising his right hand for a warm greeting. Instead, he quietly observed as the ancient three-masted sailboat sailed beyond the safe sea route and into the dark night. The desiccated face, with blood-red lips and pitch-black eyes, blended into the darkness.

Only then did Lumian wave his hand and offer a faint smile.

"Goodbye! You won't be missed!"

He then helped Franca and the others to devise a plan to confront Moran Avigny. Ultimately, he opted to await further information from 007 before finalizing their strategy.

Conspirer wasn't a visionary, known for conjuring conspiracies out of thin air; they required substantial information as a foundation.

When Lumian awoke at dawn, the Berries emerged from the dense, death-carrying fog of the Berserk Sea.

Before him stretched a clear blue sea, bathed in the intense sunlight of the high sky.

The next day, the Berries bypassed Behrens Harbor at the

northernmost tip of West Balam. Instead, they continued southwest, reaching Port Pylos by 4 p.m.
Situated in Matani, the port was under the rule of Admiral Querarill.
Originally a colony of the Intis Republic, Port Pylos saw Intis colonists withdraw after the war a few years ago. Subsequently, various factions from the Feynapotter Kingdom, maintaining a favorable relationship with Admiral Querarill, took control.
Lumian's target, Hisoka, was yet to surface in Port Pylos, but Lumian knew that the two pranks he had engaged in were in Matani. One occurred in Tizamo Town, at the outskirts of Port Pylos, closest to the forest, and the other in Devise, the southernmost gold mine city in Matani.
As Lumian unbuttoned the second button on his linen shirt, he remarked to Lugano in a self-deprecating tone,
"I feel like I'm shunned by winter and have been living in a scorching environment."
Having arrived in Port Santa during late autumn, which was relatively hot and sunny, Lumian moved on to Port Colla as Port Santa began to cool. His journey continued through what his sister called the tropics, devoid of winter and maintaining a temperature of at least around 20 degrees Celsius.
While Trier was already in midwinter, the Southern Continent was experiencing the height of summer.
This made Lumian's specially prepared black tweed coat and Gehrman-styled trench coat impractical.
"Because we've been traveling south all autumn," Lugano declared authoritatively on matters of weather and seasons.
Lumian donned a golden straw hat and strolled down the gangway to the port, hand in hand with Ludwig.
He boldly embodied the traits of the adventurer Louis Berry.
Initially, Lumian had contemplated altering his strategy, adopting a new identity to discreetly investigate the two pranks in Matani and uncover Hisoka without drawing attention. However, after Franca vividly detailed Hisoka's usual characteristics to Anthony Reid, the Hypnotist's profiling revealed an exceptionally aggressive trait, ranking among the top.
As a result, Lumian reconsidered and returned to his role of casting out "bait."
Yet, he couldn't shake the feeling that success was a slim possibility. The sea sacrificial ritual and Loki's survival had likely provided Hisoka with a comprehensive understanding of the factions backing him. April Fool's, with its former display of resources and energy, seemed ill-equipped to challenge the might

of the Tarot Club. And Lumian wasn't solely relying on the Tarot Club for support.
If he were in Hisoka's shoes, Lumian would opt for patience. He'd wait a month or two, allowing the vengeful enemy to grow restless and make mistakes. When the formidable forces behind him could no longer guarantee protection, he'd launch a surprise attack.
For now, let's not devise a plan. I'll consider it when I find clues, Lumian muttered to himself. Leaving the port alongside a throng of passengers, he reached the public carriage stop.
Numerous rental carriages and pitch-black or vermilion coffins were parked nearby.
Coffins? Despite having read many travelog books on West Balam's customs, Lumian found it absurd to witness coffins lining the roadside.
Before the invasion of the Northern Continent, before East and West Balam's division, the Balam Empire revered Death—
the Emperor of the Underworld from the War of the Four Emperors. Thus, the locals valued and loved coffins, considering them objects that brought peace, tranquility, and the blessing of Death. When traveling, they would lie inside, carried by people or pulled by horses and single-horned goats.
Of course, this form of transportation was reserved for those of a certain wealth level. Ordinary people couldn't even afford lying in a coffin.
After a momentary daze, Lumian addressed Lugano and Ludwig with interest, "Do you want to take the coffin? I plan to give it a try."
"I-I'll pass," Lugano replied, finding the idea of lying in a coffin unsettling.
Ludwig shifted his attention to the nearby street vendors.
The aroma of corn and potatoes intertwined, enticing every passerby and prompting increased saliva production.
"How lame," Lumian teased with a smile. Approaching the four locals with disheveled black hair and dark brown skin, he raised his right hand and pointed at the pitch-black coffin beneath the shade of a tree.
"How much?" Lugano inquired in fluent Dutanese before Lumian could.
"How much?" Lugano inquired in fluent Dutanese before Lumian could.
His linguistic talent was evident. Less than a month had passed since their departure from Port Santa to their arrival at Port Pylos, and he could already communicate with people in Dutanese. Of course, his proficiency was limited to basic words and short

sentences.
A half-naked local in linen pants replied in Dutanese,
"Nearby, 40 coppet; faraway, 1 verl d'or."
Recognizing the foreigner's inquiry, he refrained from quoting the price in the local currency, Delexi, the Intisian term for copper coins.
Quite affordable. This coffin, carried by four people, should be considerably cheaper than the one carried by eight... Lumian mused, appreciating the direct use of verl d'or and coppet. It showcased the recent Intisian influence in the former colony, lost only a few years ago. Lumian's grasp of Dutanese surpassed Lugano's, thanks to the mid-level Language Comprehension charm he had used on the ship.
Learning Dutanese in this manner proved more efficient.
Regarding charm consumption, Lumian harbored no concerns. In his view, items served a purpose, and there was no concept of waste as long as they proved useful. He couldn't align with those miserly individuals who hoarded their wealth throughout life, only for it to benefit others after their demise. If he urgently needed Language Comprehension charms, he could acquire them from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. If their gathering didn't align with his schedule, teleporting to various cities in Lenburg would allow him to purchase them from the Church of Knowledge.
"Sure," Lumian nodded at Lugano and said, "Let's go to Hotel Orella."
After Lugano paid 1 verl d'or, the local who had quoted the price lifted the thin coffin lid, revealing the interior covered with thick dark-red cloth and a stiff neck pillow.
Excitedly, Lumian removed his golden straw hat and lay down, immediately feeling a cooling sensation enveloping his body.
In the hot season, the coffin effectively dispelled the humidity.
Is it the coffin's wood or the sun-screening black paint, or perhaps the shade of the tree? It feels like stepping into a morgue in the summer—surprisingly comfortable... Lumian observed the thin coffin lid closing, witnessing the shadows rapidly expanding until they dominated his world.
Outside, the voices became muffled in his ears.
The coffin was lifted, swaying slightly as it moved forward.
Within Lumian's view, everything was dark, and his surroundings exuded a sinister, cold ambiance. For some reason, it felt like he was walking toward death, touching it.
Setting aside the psychological discomfort, it isn't bad. The only downside is the tendency to easily fall asleep... Lumian evaluated the mode of transportation in a good mood. It's unsuitable for

mixed-gender rides, which could be more awkward. Heh heh, I wonder if the "romantic" Intisians have ever engaged in an affair under such circumstances?

Nearly half an hour later, the coffin halted in front of Hotel Orella.

Lumian stepped out, finding himself in front of a small, man-made valley.

Rows of grayish-black stone rooms encircled the inner wall of the "deep valley" until reaching the bottom.

This was Port Pylos's most renowned Hotel Orella.

Originally belonging to a Balam royal family descendant, Orella Eggers, it had been constructed with the intent of approaching death. Later, it fell into the hands of Intis colonists.

Upon the Feynapotterians' arrival, they perceived it as a symbol of entering the earth and returning to the land, prompting its transformation into a sizable hotel.

Chapter 634: Fresh Off The Boat

In the well-lit lobby of Hotel Orella, aboveground, Lugano effortlessly balanced Ludwig, munching on a burrito, in one hand and clutched his suitcase in the other. His eyes darted around uneasily. From his adventurous beginnings to trailing Lumian south, he'd never lodged in a place proudly declaring itself a "hotel" instead of a "motel."

He'd only encountered Trier's renowned Grand Champs-Élysée in newspapers and magazines, learning that its construction cost a whopping 21 million verl d'or. With 800 rooms and 65 functional halls, even the most basic accommodations demanded 12 verl d'or per day in the off-season. A stark contrast to Lugano's usual frugal 3.5 verl d'or weekly motel stays.

The bustling metropolis of Trier had left an indelible mark on Lugano, urging him to rise above and recommend himself to Lumian.

Accumulating wealth, obtaining potion ingredients, and advancing to Doctor became his priorities.

He aspired to join the ranks of high society!

Only when he became a Doctor did he grasp the vastness of the Beyonder world. He had barely scratched its surface.

The male receptionist, sporting curly black hair, dark brown skin, and a keen countenance, addressed Lugano in fluent Intisian.

"Would you prefer a suite or a standard room? Are you inclined towards a coffin bed or a conventional one?"

Lugano glanced at his employer.

Lumian toyed with a caramel-colored East Balam cigarette wrapped in roasted tobacco leaves, bringing it to his nose for a gentle sniff. He savored the blend of tobacco leaves, internal spices, and assorted herbs.

The aroma was mildly invigorating and redolent, tempting one to inhale deeply.

"A suite. Standard, and closer to ground level." Lumian had sampled rental coffins for transportation and had no plans to continue sleeping in them.

It wasn't a traumatic experience, but it did alter his perception of his surroundings. In case of an attack, it could impede his initial response.

Lugano sighed in relief upon hearing Lumian's decision and conveyed the employer's request to the male receptionist.

"8 verl d'or a day. Three days' payment in advance," the native male receptionist stated the price.

After Lugano completed the payment, the receptionist, with a nod

to his colleagues, said obsequiously, "I'll escort you down."
Three mechanical elevators stood at the back of the hall. Lumian and his group entered the middle door, pulling the brass handle to B3.
Chains tightened, gears clamped, and various metal parts started to operate with resonating sounds. In the distance, it resembled the roar of a boiler, and white steam billowed out.
As the mechanical elevator descended, the native receptionist glanced at Ludwig and smiled at Lumian.
"Settling down in Port Pylos, are you?
"If you need info on local grammar schools and rentals in different communities, feel free to approach me."
In his view, anyone bringing a seven- or eight-year-old child to the Southern Continent was likely moving, not merely traveling. After all, the child was too young for perilous long-distance journeys.
Moving meant finding a house—renting or buying—and choosing a good school. These were all opportunities to make money!
At the mention of "school," Ludwig, munching on a roasted corn cob, suddenly stopped chewing, as if the food had lost its fragrance.
Lumian wasn't oblivious to the native receptionist's thoughts but didn't mind. Instead, he admired the man's shrewdness.
He grinned and remarked, "I'll take a look first. We haven't confirmed if we would stay in Port Pylos."
At that moment, the mechanical elevator halted at B3.
Entering the room on the right, with a stone fence on one side and the cold valley aisle on the other, Lumian addressed the native receptionist, "Do you know Tizamo Town?"
The native receptionist, aiding Lugano with the suitcase, slightly bent and led the way.
"I do. Many gentlemen head to Tizamo on weekends for forest hunting.
"There are secret temples and mausoleums left behind by former nobles in the forest. If you want to have fun, don't venture too deep. The primitive tribes there are barbaric and savage."
Lumian nodded, not probing further. Upon reaching Suite 7 and entering the living room, he casually tossed a verl d'or silver coin to the native receptionist.
"What's your name?"
The receptionist, pleasantly surprised, responded, "You can call me Ron."
Lumian chuckled.
"I might have to trouble you often in the future. For example, what's the name of the nearest and better bars? Where is it?"

Ron touched the silver coin and smiled.
"It's my honor to assist you.
"Head to the Man-Eating Flower Bar. Intisian is used for communication there. It's on the street behind our hotel."
Lumian instructed Lugano and left the room with Ron, waiting for one of the mechanical elevators.
Inside, a man with a deathly pale face and vacant eyes stood.
The man's face was deathly pale, and his eyes were vacant. He wore a wrinkled shirt and pants.
Lumian glanced at him without a word.
Amidst the tightening of the chain and the relatively stable elevation, the mechanical lift returned to the ground.
Once the vacant-eyed man exited the lift and distanced himself from them, Ron leaned closer to Lumian and whispered, "I wanted to remind you to pretend not to see that customer."
"Who is he?" Lumian asked casually.
Ron glanced around and lowered his voice.
"He resides in a suite at B18, a servant of Mr. Iveljsta.
"That gentleman's servants don't seem normal."
Of course, it's not normal. They are walking corpses... Lumian criticized.
He had already observed the servant and realized his fate was dark and that of a deceased.
Lumian wasn't surprised to encounter such a situation in a country that once worshipped Death.
Having already seen the Blood Emperor's afterimage, encountering a zombie was hardly shocking.
...
In the sweltering evening, Lumian bypassed the artificial deep valley where Hotel Orella stood and entered a street with an unpronounceable name. He spotted a bar adorned with an exaggerated Man-Eating Flower.
Donning a golden straw hat, he lit the East Balam cigarette purchased from the hotel lobby and placed it between his lips.
Cough, cough, cough!
Lumian quickly coughed, emitting white smoke from his nose.
His intention was to showcase his experience as an experienced adventurer by smoking East Balam cigarettes, but he hadn't anticipated their potency. As someone who rarely smoked, he found it unbearable.
In Cordu, various cheap alcohols abounded, but cigarettes were scarce. Lumian had only witnessed Pons Bénet, Louis Lund, and a few others indulging in smoking.
After extinguishing the East Balam cigarette and tossing it into the

trash can, Lumian entered the bar and skillfully approached the counter. He pulled up a barstool and settled in.
Sensing the lingering smoke in his mouth, he opted for something milder. He tapped the counter and spoke in Intisian, "A glass of kilju, the regular kind."
"Ten licks," replied the bartender, a local man in a white shirt and black vest, his Intisian tinged with a distinct accent.
Lumian settled the bill and awaited the bartender's pour. He discreetly surveyed the area, noticing nobody paying him any heed except for a dozen wanted posters adorning the bar's wall.
Thoughtfully accepting the amber-colored kilju, he adjusted his golden straw hat and addressed the bartender with a smile, "Do you know who I am?"
The bartender glanced at him and smiled back.
"Every now and then, a self-proclaimed renowned adventurer poses that question, but I'm sorry, I don't know you."
From the looks of it, the adventurer Louis Berry's exploits in hunting the Demon Warlock are primarily known in the Fog Sea. My rising fame was tied to activities within the Church of Earth Mother's sphere of influence. Louis Berry's reputation waned upon entering the Berserk Sea, and few in West Balam are familiar with him... If Hisoka isn't stationed at the docks every day, he likely doesn't know about my arrival in Port Pylos... Lumian refrained from erupting in rage at the bartender's words. He sipped his kilju, contemplating the situation.
Noticing Lumian's silence, the bartender casually smiled and remarked, "You just arrived in the Southern Continent, right?"
"Yes, I left the Berserk Sea this morning." Lumian seamlessly assumed the role of a regular at Ol' Tavern, recounting his story with a smile. "Encountered a ghost ship in the Berserk Sea, danced with dried corpses under the moon, and repelled a Demon's attack. Praise the Mother of All Things. You might never understand how magical and dangerous the Berserk Sea is..."
The bartender wiped the glass's inner wall and interrupted Lumian.
"I know. After all, that's where Death disappeared."
"Where Death disappeared?" Lumian asked in surprise.
While he had speculated about the dangers of the Berserk Sea and abnormal weather being linked to a deity's demise, he hadn't expected such an easy answer.
The bartender regarded Lumian with an expression that implied, "You're actually a rookie."
"Have you never heard of the legend of treasures at sea?
"At the top is Death's Key. It's said that at the end of the Fourth

Epoch, Death, who had lost the Pale-White War, stirred violent waves to obstruct the returning enemy to Balam, creating insurmountable obstacles that severed the Northern and Southern Continents. However, He ultimately didn't return to His throne and vanished. Only those with the special key can find Him, discover the treasures He left behind, and gain His boon."
The bartender's tone was complicated.
Lumian fell silent.
He had embarked on the sea seeking revenge and held little interest in treasure legends. He hadn't anticipated missing such crucial information.
Just then, the heavy wooden door of the bar creaked open.
The once-noisy bar hushed in an instant.
Sensing the shift in atmosphere, Lumian turned his body, fixing his gaze upon the door.

Chapter 635: Man-Eating Flower

At the entrance of the Man-Eating Flower bar, a figure strode in.

A woman, neither towering nor petite, clad in a conservative, deep-black dress, caught everyone's attention. Her eyebrows were meticulously drawn, her skin thickly powdered, and her cheeks adorned with noticeable blush. Her lips shone gorgeously, and the area around her eyes sparkled with gem-like hues.

Despite the woman's excessive makeup and unconventional style, her captivating brown eyes, high nose bridge, luscious lips, and curvaceous figure emitted a potent charm.

Male patrons in the bar shifted their gazes to the door, momentarily silent. Only when the woman acknowledged a few customers with an aloof nod did the atmosphere spring to life. Some attempted conversation, while others raised their voices at their companions, trying to make an impression on her.

Without lingering, the woman navigated through the crowd and settled on the opposite side of the bar counter.

Unique. If Franca were here, she'd surely strike up a conversation... Lumian felt a twinge of regret for his companion and averted his gaze. He smiled at the bartender and commented,

"That lady seems quite popular."

The bartender wiped away the expression reserved for new adventurers and replied sternly,

"She's my boss."

Boss... Lumian suddenly recalled the bar's name and asked thoughtfully,

"Man-Eating Flower?"

"It's her," the bartender lowered his voice and approached the beautifully made-up woman of indeterminate age. He poured her a glass of some unknown brand of Black Rand.

After the bartender returned, Lumian asked curiously,

"Why does she have the nickname 'Man-Eating Flower?'

"She seems very popular."

The bartender instinctively turned his head, observing his boss as she focused on her drink and surveyed the patrons nearby. Leaning in, he whispered,

"In Port Pylos, women of her caliber often relish the pursuit and adulation of men but keep them at arm's length. Our boss, however, is different. If she takes a liking to you, she'll extend an invitation for a memorable night. Sometimes, we can hear her passion echoing through the halls upstairs..."

The bartender paused, a mix of nostalgia and desire evident on his face.

Pleasure? Lumian subtly frowned and inquired with a smile, "Have you ever been the object of her affections?"
The bartender fell silent.
For a moment, Lumian wondered if the other would smash his head with the cup in hand.
Changing the subject, Lumian asked, "Aren't there brash men who try to force themselves on your boss?"
The bartender sighed and replied, "Remember the name of our bar."
Man-Eating Flower... *Is that what it means?* Lumian grasped the meaning.
The bartender elaborated, "Those who tried to force themselves on our boss ended up badly. Some were severely injured or thrown down the stairs. Others simply vanished.
"Even those who caught her eye would be pale the next day, legs unsteady. They couldn't walk properly.
"That's why she's called 'Man-Eating Flower.' She embraces it. Eventually, she named the bar after it."
This is a departure from the Demonesses of Pleasure's style... But each demoness has her own unique approach. Franca, a Demoness of Pleasure, stands out from the rest... Lumian's curiosity sated, he didn't delve further into the bar owner. Instead, he retrieved an ordinary deck of poker cards from his Traveler's Bag and asked, "Have you come across anyone using poker cards as a weapon recently?"
According to Anthony Reid's analysis of Hisoka, a key member of April Fool's, Hisoka had a strong inclination towards self-expression. After successfully creating the poker card with the ability to change its face, possessing Frost and Cut characteristics, it was clear he wouldn't limit its use to mere April Fool's pranks. When engaged in combat or carrying out acts of violence, he wouldn't hesitate to employ the mystical item to end his target's life.
This information presented a promising lead for investigation.
Regarding the two pranks orchestrated by Hisoka, they revolved around Matani and were linked to relatively confidential or significant local affairs. Individuals who weren't locals or lacked prolonged residence wouldn't spontaneously choose this area unless they also possessed ample information to support their actions.
Lumian reasonably suspected that Hisoka's original sphere of activity centered on Matani and its neighboring regions.
This rationale prompted his journey to Matani, despite believing that Hisoka had likely heeded Loki's warning and evaded capture,

concealing himself.
Understanding Hisoka's past was crucial to deciphering his present and ending his future!
The native bartender scoffed at Lumian's inquiry.
"Do you think I'd have that information?
"Consult the patrol team. Whether they choose to answer is another matter."
Patrol team... Lumian didn't mind and nodded slightly.
Established by Admiral Querarill, the ruler of Matani, the among Beyonders.
In this state, following the withdrawal of most Intis colonial forces, the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun, the Church of God of Steam and Machinery, and the new Cathedral of the Church of Earth Mother lacked official authority to enforce the law.
While these churches maintained Beyonder teams in their cathedrals across different cities, their jurisdiction was limited to self-defense and safeguarding believers within the cathedral. They couldn't address matters akin to their usual spheres of influence or eliminate potential hidden dangers.
Admiral Querarill entrusted the corresponding authority to the newly formed patrol team.
Some of the patrol team's Beyonders were veterans from Admiral Querarill's army, while others were remnants of the former Balam Empire or former adventurers and bounty hunters.
What a simple name... Lumian pondered for a moment as he glanced at the few wanted posters on the wall.
"Admiral Querarill doesn't want adventurers turning Matani into a hunting paradise? He doesn't want them brawling on the streets under the guise of pursuing targets on wanted posters?"
The bartender shot Lumian a surprised look.
"You're quite sharp for an adventurer.
"In Matani, the wanted status is earned through crimes committed here. No one cares about your actions elsewhere."
As expected of one of the adventure paradises... Lumian lifted the kilju and finished it.
Just as he was about to switch to a glass of West Balam-
specific liquor to savor its distinct flavors, he felt a gaze upon him.
It was the owner of the Man-Eating Flower bar, the woman in the black dress with exquisite makeup.
Lumian nodded calmly and shifted his focus back to the bartender.
While this Man-Eating Flower was undoubtedly attractive, she couldn't match a Demoness in terms of feminine allure. Additionally, Lumian wasn't fond of heavy makeup.
At that moment, the woman rose from her seat and sauntered

over to Lumian. She curled her lips and remarked, "I can sense that you're like me, a living volcano, but it hasn't erupted yet. You're still enduring and waiting in pain.
"Tonight, are you willing to feel my passion?"
Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his face.
You're taken with me just like that?
Come to think of it, I've been a hit with the ladies since my youth. Being a Hunter, I've often found myself surrounded by all sorts of beauties... Could this be the subtle influence of the True Men pathway? It doesn't add up. According to The Adventurer series and recent sea rumors, Mr. Fool's Oracle, Danitz, is also from the Hunter pathway, yet his romantic endeavors were fruitless, and he doesn't boast any notable female companions...
Lumian muttered internally and stood up. He offered a smile and inquired, "How should I address you?"
"Bellotia." The woman's smile relaxed, making Lumian feel that she might appear even more stunning without her heavy makeup.
Lumian took off his golden straw hat, pressed it to his chest, and bowed slightly.
"Madam Bellotia, I appreciate your invitation, but there's someone else I hold dear."
As he spoke, he disregarded Bellotia's slightly stiffened expression and made his way past the Man-Eating Flower, heading for the bar's entrance with composed demeanor.
Bellotia didn't stop him. Like numerous patrons in the bar, she observed as he swung open the sturdy wooden door and stepped out.
As the wooden door thudded shut behind him, Lumian sneered and muttered to himself, I can resist even the charm of a Demoness of Pleasure. *Why take the risk with a woman of unknown origins?*
Using someone I like as an excuse is already preserving your dignity. If you still seek revenge, I won't hold back...
Having left the bar early, Lumian wandered through the nearby streets, exploring secluded alleys in hopes of stumbling upon incidents or criminals to gather information.
After turning a few corners, he suddenly heard a clanging sound emanating from a dark and deserted alley.
Silently, Lumian approached and delved into the alley. There, he witnessed an intense battle between two men.
One, with evident native characteristics, appeared in his twenties. His face was pallid, and he wielded a sharp but hefty dagger in his right hand. His left palm was slightly open, and a dark shadow hovered in it, creating a chilling atmosphere.

The other, in his early thirties, had ordinary facial features and an expressionless demeanor. Short, black hair framed his face, and his dark-green eyes were encircled by white.

Clad in a plain white shirt and black pants, he wielded longer, sharper weapons resembling scalpels in each hand.

At this moment, the two engaged in a fierce battle, their weapons clashing rapidly, resonating with metallic clangs.

Observing the skirmish, Lumian recognized that these weren't ordinary individuals. They both bore Beyonder characteristics.

Halting his advance, Lumian nonchalantly stood with his hands in his pockets, his right foot propped up against the wall. He unabashedly observed the close-quarters combat between these Beyonders.

Chapter 636: Catharsis

In just over ten seconds, the two Beyonders locked in combat sensed an observer and instinctively distanced themselves, fixing their gaze on Lumian.

Casually leaning against the alley wall, Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Go on, keep fighting. Don't mind me."

With a heavy dagger in hand, the young native, his left palm slightly open, eyed the black-haired, green-eyed, handsome, golden straw hat-donning Lumian with vigilance.

Who is this?

What is he up to?

The short-haired man, armed with two odd-shaped scalpels, was equally vigilant.

He, too, eyed Lumian and the vigilant young native. Suddenly, he crouched, arms hanging loose, and black, sulfurous smoke enveloped him completely.

Lumian's smile didn't waver; his right eyebrow arched in mild interest.

Unfazed, the young native extended his slightly open left hand, releasing a shadow that expanded into a distorted "black cloud."

This "black cloud" merged with the sulfurous smoke, swiftly clearing the alley. The crimson moon once again illuminated the scene.

However, the short-haired man, with dark-green eyes and an emotionless expression, had vanished.

Ran off? The young native was shocked, angry, and vexed.

As he sought clues, he instinctively turned his head to where Lumian had been.

No one stood before the wall.

When did he leave? Why didn't I sense it at all? the young native, holding the heavy dagger, pondered in bewilderment, uncertain whether to pursue his target.

...

Relying on his spell-like abilities, Bram skillfully escaped the alley, stowing away the two odd-shaped scalpels. He navigated the dark, unlit paths, frequently changing directions in an attempt to lose his imaginary pursuer.

In the process, he pried open a shoemaker's shop on the street, donned a pair of ill-fitting leather shoes, and discreetly handled any signs of his intrusion.

After circling three times, Bram returned to the alley, entering a simple apartment nearby, constructed from black stones and brown wood.

Bram opened his room and entered, closing the wooden door behind him.
He finally breathed a sigh of relief.
Then, he withdrew a transparent glass bottle from the grayish-white cloth bag hanging from his waist. The bottle held a nearly colorless liquid, faintly tinged with red. Suspended within, a blood-colored, well-defined mouth hung open, frozen in intense pain and fear.
As if admiring a masterpiece, Bram stared entranced at the glass bottle in his grasp.
After a moment, he averted his gaze, moved to the side of the room, and opened a cupboard.
Within the cupboard, seven or eight similar glass bottles awaited, each containing a unique lip. The hues varied, some slightly upturned, others in a pouting stance.
Bram positioned his newly acquired spoils in an empty spot, then used sticky blood-colored paint to draw an ominous symbol.
With the task complete, his fingers gently explored different lips through the glass bottles, as if assessing each piece in an art exhibition.
"How twisted."
A mocking sigh suddenly resonated in Bram's ears.
Startled, he whirled around, focusing on the source of the voice. A golden straw hat-donning young man with black hair and green eyes sat in an armchair by the table, the top two buttons of his white shirt now casually undone.
Him?
Bram's pupils dilated as he recognized the man who had witnessed his clash with the Numinous Episcopate member.
The person who had witnessed his battle with the Numinous Episcopate member!
When did he tail me?
How did he pinpoint my location without detection...
Lumian smiled and cordially responded to the other's unspoken queries,
"Hasn't anyone informed you that the preservative in those glass bottles is quite noticeable?
"Moreover, you reek of blood after killing someone."
Bram's heart tightened.
"Are you a Hunter?"
As he spoke, he moved slowly and quietly.
"You seem to know a lot," Lumian replied calmly. "So, why collect those lips, preserve them, and carry them with you? That doesn't sound like the work of a seasoned Serial Killer. I get it. You have

the urge and the necessity to gather trophies. Is it for your own satisfaction or part of a ritual? Heh heh, desire can be destructive. Even the most Coldblooded are prone to errors, despite their calculated demeanor, often wagering that they won't be caught if they overlook the details."
Observing the twisted murderer summon black, sulfurous smoke, Lumian deduced that he was a Sequence 7 Serial Killer following the Criminal pathway.
In the Devilology book of the New City of Silver, it was noted that upon reaching Sequence 8 Coldblooded, also known as the Unwinged Angel, individuals underwent inhuman changes, acquiring two or three Devil spell-like abilities, varying from person to person. Some wielded poisonous flames, while others inflicted damaging curses. The creation of black smoke was one such ability.
Combining the target's actions in battle, Lumian concluded he was merely a Sequence 7 Serial Killer.
Bram's brow twitched at Lumian's mockery and sarcasm.
Maintaining his cool, he advanced and murmured, "Did you come here just to converse? What is it you seek from me?"
As soon as he finished speaking, dense black smoke billowed from the Serial Killer, carrying a pungent sulfuric aroma.
Within the shroud of the dark smoke, Bram's eyes deepened as he unleashed another Devil spell.
His body morphed, adopting the color of a chameleon, seamlessly blending with the spreading smoke.
Swift and silent, he approached the door, opened it with precision, and lunged outside.
Bram's vision distorted, and amidst the lingering black smoke, he glimpsed the green-eyed man in the armchair, grinning at him.
Suddenly, he found himself back in the room.
Contrary to his previous orientation, he now faced away from the door.
Bottle of Fiction!
Upon infiltrating the room, Lumian's initial action wasn't a pose but the creation of a Bottle of Fiction, one that prevented Beyonders from exiting!
Unfazed by the sudden wave of disappointment and frustration, Bram darted to the side within the obscurity of the black smoke obscuring his vision. Rolling to the bedside, he retrieved a six-barrel machine gun.
Raising the machine gun, he aimed it at Lumian and unleashed a barrage of bullets.
Amidst the rapid gunfire, Lumian disappeared from the armchair,

the furniture torn apart by the storm of metal projectiles.
Gone? As this realization hit Bram, he instinctively glanced upward and witnessed the man in the golden straw hat descending from the ceiling. Surrounding him were numerous crimson, almost white, flaming ravens.
Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Fire Ravens assailed Bram before Lumian's arrival.
Caught within the encirclement, Bram reluctantly abandoned the six-barrel machine gun. Attempting to evade the impending explosion, he sought refuge under the bed.
However, the crimson, nearly white Fire Ravens dissipated on their own. Lumian landed before him, adorned with a grayish-
white lightning brooch. He smiled and said, "Didn't you just ask me what I wanted? What I want is simple. I haven't vented for too long. I'm in dire need of a humanoid sandbag."
As he finished speaking, Lumian swung his fist at the retreating Bram.
Instinctively, Bram raised his right arm to block.
With a resounding bang, a silver-white bolt of lightning surged from Lumian's fist into Bram's arm, coursing through his entire body.
Bram shuddered. Despite his inhuman transformation, a momentary paralysis gripped him.
Lumian's other fist followed suit, crashing into Bram's side profile.
Bang!
The Serial Killer's head tilted, and a spray of teeth accompanied by blood scattered.
Once more, silver-white lightning enveloped Bram's head.
Bam! Bam! Bam! Lumian unleashed a barrage of punches, turning the encounter into a tempest, making Bram feel like he was caught in a thunderstorm. The electric shocks made any form of retaliation or defense nearly impossible.
Bang! Bang! Bang!
Lumian's expression remained icy as he relentlessly struck Bram's face, chest, arms, and head. The Criminal Pathway Beyonder's chest caved, ribs cracked, face swelled, and skull fractured. Charred marks covered his upper body after the brutal assault.
After the relentless beating, Lumian clenched his fists and raised his arm.
He crashed into Bram's left shoulder.
Bang!
Bram's left shoulder crumpled entirely.
Collapsed on the ground, twisted and gasping, Bram's breath weakened.

"That's it? It's fine. I can get my servant to treat you before continuing," Lumian remarked, wearing a devilish smile that Bram recognized all too well.

Without awaiting Bram's fearful response, Lumian removed the Fury of the Sea brooch, stowing it back into his Traveler's Bag. In a gentle tone, he inquired, "Tell me, which family are you from?"

Bram, undergoing the initial stages of dehumanization with a robust physique, realized Lumian had purposely avoided vital points in his attacks, leaving him far from unconsciousness. His mind still functioned, and thoughts raced before settling on Lumian's smile.

After a momentary silence, Bram weakly replied, "I'm a member of the Andariel family."

Chapter 637: Unexpected Information

Andariel, one of the three Devil families... Lumian recognized the last name from Madam Magician and asked with a warm smile, "What brings you to Port Pylos?"

If it weren't for the lineage running in Devil families for generations, with descendants naturally inclined towards the Criminal pathway, and the other option of the Prisoner pathway seemingly trouble-free, Bram Andariel couldn't shake the suspicion that the man before him carried the last name Nois or Beria. Why did he exude more of a Devil vibe than Bram himself?

Struggling, he lifted his right hand, wiping his swollen and cracked face, cleaning up the blood and flinging it to the ground.

With the task completed, Bram responded, "Firstly, it's to gather information about Matani for the family. Secondly, it's to find an opportunity to act as a Serial Killer. Do you know what acting is?"

He cooperated with Lumian by speaking in Intisian.

Lumian nonchalantly stood before Bram, who was curled up on the ground, and remarked with a smile,

"Your acting is subpar. You don't seem to be a criminal with a high IQ.

"Why would the Andariel family gather information about Matani?"

Bram had no intention of concealing the truth for the family.

"We're cooperating with the Rose School of Thought. They want information on this place."

The Rose School of Thought setting its sights on Matani? That's right. Matani, seemingly detached from any Northern Continent nation, holds ties to the Feynapotter Kingdom, but their influence is lacking. With Admiral Querarill's sway, even if the Rose School of Thought and the Andariel family dispatch only a handful of agents, resisting may prove challenging... Lumian perceived the stark contrast between the Southern and Northern Continents.

Whether in Trier, the Feynapotter Kingdom, or the maritime colonies, Lumian encountered criminal acts and mystical disasters driven by the pursuit of strength and faith. Encroachments on factions or cities were rare, but West Balam presented a different scenario on his first day.

If maritime disorder resulted from chaos, the Southern Continent teemed with factional conflicts, overt or covert, causing widespread chaos.

Lumian, observing Bram's wound clotting, questioned further, "What intel does the Rose School of Thought seek?"

Bram, reflecting, responded, "They want all kinds of information—

cathedral locations, military camp details, patrol team compositions, port throughput, daily prices, and the locals' lives."
Are they preparing to rule this place in the future? Lumian inquired, puzzled.
"To whom will you hand over the information you gathered? Where?"
"It will be written and placed in the study of an empty house at 17 Aleg Street. My uncle, Devajo Andariel, will be responsible for retrieving it. We don't usually contact each other, and I don't know where he lives or under what identity," Bram explained in detail. "After becoming a Devil, his special ability is to completely skin humans and perform complicated processes to create Beyonder items with usage or time limitations. No matter who it is, as long as he wears the human skin as clothes, he can transform into the other person and complete the corresponding disguise."
As Bram spoke, he wiped the blood off his body and flung it to the ground, as if obsessed with cleanliness.
This was mentioned in Devilology... Lumian nodded thoughtfully.
He pondered for a moment and asked, "Are there any traces of other Devils in Matani?"
Perhaps Bram and his uncle weren't the only ones sent by the Rose School of Thought to gather information.
Bram shook his head.
"Not recently.
"However, during my investigation, I stumbled upon a string of serial murders around Port Pylos about four years back.
"The victims lay dissected, the scene steeped in blood and marked by the aftermath of a fierce battle. Moreover, the seven casualties were no ordinary individuals; they were Beyonders, ranging from Sequence 7 to Sequence 8."
Listening intently, Lumian felt a surge of intrigue.
As per Franca's explanation, the name "Hisoka" stemmed from a literary work hailing from the original world of transmigrators like themselves. One of the character's defining traits was an insatiable appetite for combat and the thrill of extinguishing formidable adversaries, reveling in the ecstasy and carnage of claiming lives. If the target was sufficiently potent, he'd patiently await their growth, perhaps even offer a nudge.
Hisoka, a key member in April Fool's, adopted this moniker as his code name, driven by an unmistakable urge for self-expression, mirroring this characteristic.
Hisoka is a Beyonder of the Devil pathway. Moreover, his targets are Beyonders while he was at the Serial Killer stage. Unlike other Serial Killers, he doesn't prey on the weak or ordinary people. If he

had been a Serial Killer four years ago, he would likely be at least a Sequence 6 by now. There's a strong chance he's a Sequence 5... Yes, he's concealed his identity very effectively. No one in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society knows his true pathway...
Lumian listened attentively to Bram's account without interruption. He eagerly pondered the possibility that Hisoka was a Devil or even a Desire Apostle in his mind.
The curled-up Bram glanced up at him, propping his bloody palm on the ground, and straightening his body slightly.
"This seems like the work of a Serial Killer. Moreover, he's exceedingly confident in his strength and intellect, daring to target Beyonders. However, I noticed some discrepancies."
"What discrepancies?" Lumian concealed his joy behind a gentle smile.
Bram shifted his palm to support himself.
"Serial Killers' victims often exhibit degraded behaviors. For instance, those I've selected typically share a common trait: they enjoy inflicting verbal harm and curses upon others for extended periods. Thus, I'd remove their lips and preserve them. However, the seven slain Beyonders had varying identities, backgrounds, and behaviors, lacking the typical degeneracy."
"Perhaps he's merely a Beyonder with a fascination for serial killing, not necessarily acting out the Devil pathway,"
Lumian mused, masking his interest with a teasing tone. He added playfully, "Were you subjected to constant verbal violence as a child?"
And the Coldblooded and Serial Killer potions amplified corresponding resentments and psychological traumas?
Bram fell silent, his body gradually stretching out, no longer curled up.
Only then did Lumian steer the conversation back to the serial murder case from four years ago.
"Do you have detailed information about the seven Beyonders who were killed?
"Did you identify any suspects during the initial investigation?"
Bram shook his head slowly.
"I only had read the summary provided by the patrol team, not the full investigation files.
"Most of the patrol team members were seasoned Beyonders who had encountered Mutants and Devils before. Their judgment should be reliable."
Patrol team... Lumian grinned at Bram and remarked, "Is there any other information you deem crucial to share with me? If not, let's proceed."

"Yes, of course." Bram straightened his back abruptly.
In the next moment, he spat out foul words in a language Lumian had never heard before.
Devil Language!
As the Devil words reverberated, the blood, bloodstains, and bloody handprints that Bram had left on the ground were enveloped in a faint light.
A mystical connection seemed to form between them, linking them based on their location, creating sinister symbols and patterns.
In the room's far cupboard, glass bottles filled with lips and colorless liquid trembled suddenly, as if rocked by an earthquake.
This marked the initiation of a ritual to summon the projection of an Abyssal Devil!
Serial Killers executed serial murders not solely for the thrill but also to appease the Abyssal Devils. Once the killing spree concluded, Serial Killers could proceed to the final step of the ritual, summoning the projection of the corresponding Abyssal Devil. This granted them the assistance needed to fulfill their desires.
Though Bram's string of murders wasn't entirely finished and fell short by a few targets, he had met the minimum threshold. It satisfied the basic quantitative requirements, allowing him to expedite the ritual.
Understandably, this shortcut wouldn't yield the same effectiveness as the standard procedure. Yet, in the face of urgency and danger, Bram paid little heed.
He cooperated willingly, divulging information to divert the enemy's focus from his subtle actions. For instance, allowing blood to drip onto the ground in a specific pattern and pressing his blood-stained palm in a particular location. These marks replaced conspicuous evil and degenerate symbols with subtler, blood-stained alternatives.
With the preparations complete, Bram could utilize the Devil Language's "activate" to trigger the ritual, pleasing a high-level Devil and summoning its projection to confront the enemy!
Lumian silently observed Bram Andariel's "handiwork," feeling the room steeped in malevolence and tainted by corruption.
He raised his right hand, snapping his fingers.
Bram, coldly observing him while anticipating the ritual's protection, suddenly heard a rumbling emanate from within his body.
In confusion, he lowered his head and scrutinized his form. Crimson flames erupted from within, inflicting the agony of

violent waves tearing through his internal organs, bones, and flesh.
Darkness gripped Bram's consciousness, accompanied by searing pain.
The last sight before losing consciousness: A black-haired young man with green eyes, sporting a golden straw hat, curved his lips, maintaining a warm smile. It was as though he watched a clown diligently tumble into a trap.
Rumble!
The ritual concluded prematurely. An explosion originating from Bram's body tore him into multiple fragments.
Fire Infusion and Delayed Explosion!
As Lumian adorned the Fury of the Sea brooch and ruthlessly assailed Bram, he not only released pent-up emotions but also covertly infused flames into Bram's body, triggering a Delayed Explosion.
This precaution aimed to avert any mishaps.
Moreover, there was no intention of granting forgiveness or negotiating a deal to spare Bram. Thus, there existed no psychological barrier to implanting a controlled time bomb within his body, ready to be activated.
Rumble!
Corpse fragments scattered across the room, some plastering the walls. Yet, this tumultuous event remained contained within the confines of the Bottle of Fiction.

Chapter 638: Possible Enemy

"My father bore the last name Andariel, cut down by a curse unleashed by a Devil's projection during a ritual gone awry.

"Inheriting his mantle, I became a Beyonder. My mother remains a mystery, perhaps just another name etched into my father's ledger of victims...

Upon the murky surface of a dark mirror, Bram Andariel's blood-drained visage recounted his origins with an impassive mask.

Franca, "invited" by Lumian, faced a full-body mirror, employing her unique magic mirror spirit channeling technique to delve into the Andariel family and the Rose School of Thought.

Regrettably, Bram lingered on the fringes of the secret organization and his Devilish family. His insights were scant. Moreover, to divert Lumian's scrutiny and covertly finalize the ritual preparations, he divulged truths without deceit.

With Spirit Channeling reaching its threshold, Franca posed a final query.

"Who leads the Andariel family now?"

Bram's increasingly translucent and sinister countenance contorted abruptly.

"He—he's dead.

"He became a sacrifice!"

Sacrifice... such theatricality? Before Franca could delve deeper, Bram's figure waned swiftly, dissipating into nothingness.

As the Demoness of Pleasure concluded the ritual, she clicked her tongue and addressed Lumian, "The Andariel family's state is dire. Even the patriarch can be offered as a sacrifice. Are they fully controlled by the Rose School of Thought?"

In light of the temperance faction's alignment with the Church of The Fool within the Rose School of Thought, Franca glossed over distinctions between factions. After all, the Rose School likely teemed with adherents of indulgence.

Lumian responded contemplatively, "The situation in the Abyss isn't quite right either..."

Whether Naboredisley was the pseudonym of Devil Monarch Farbauti or not, the plight of the blood-colored Demon deep within Hanth Island mirrored the Abyss's troubles to some extent.

With a scoff, Lumian remarked, "We're accustomed to damning others to hell and the Abyss. We believed it to be the worst place. Who knew the Abyss itself could decay? It's falling into its own abyss."

"A hellish jest indeed." Franca glanced at the pristine night sky, less tainted by industrial pollution. The crimson moon of the Southern

Continent appeared clearer and brighter.
She steered the conversation back on track.
"If Hisoka truly is from the Devil pathway, his actions make sense.
"The Research Society was lax. Minimal filters or restrictions on its members..."
Franca and Lumian were aware that the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society operated in a way that there were no Devil pathway Beyonders, but nobody knew the truth. Membership didn't entail self-declaration of pathways or proof. Sequences were discerned through interactions at gatherings. Hisoka remained an enigma, his pathways and Sequence elusive even to key April Fool's members.
"Hisoka has always been a loner. He rarely participates in other April Fool's pranks. Is he afraid of being discovered as a Devil?" Lumian contemplated, adding, "He was most inclined to collaborate with Mad Lady, an unabashed lunatic who couldn't care less. She might even relish the prospect of testing if a Devil's blood runs cold..."
I sense a subtle mockery, insinuating my penchant for experimentation... Yet, despite being a Coldblooded, the remnant blood of the Serial Killer Bram retained a hint of warmth. Does Coldblooded mainly denote emotional detachment rather than literal coldness? Or could it be the Southern Continent's summer, heating up the blood of cold-blooded creatures... Franca's musings drifted.
Franca then cautioned Lumian, "If Hisoka is truly a Devil, he'll sense your malice the moment you uncover a key clue. He can decide whether to strike or flee, shifting to another country to hide.
"Dammit! Pursuing a Devil is a real hassle. When we can't beat him, he strikes first. When we can, he's nowhere to be found."
"We could use a Demon Hunter in times like these," Lumian half-jokingly remarked.
From Devilology, Lumian knew that Sequence 4 of the Warrior pathway was the Demon Hunter—an expert in hunting Devils. They were natural adversaries to Devils, Desire Apostles, and even Demons.
One of the Demon Hunters' crucial skills was concealing their actions and intentions, making it impossible for targets capable of sensing danger to detect them!
Franca concurred succinctly, "Now I see why Madam Magician sent you the spirit world's coordinates, instructing you to visit the New City of Silver and find Mr. Sun to eliminate the remaining corruption. It's dominated by the Warrior pathway and boasts

many Demon Hunters.
"Though enlisting a Demon Hunter throughout the entire process might strain our resources."
That was a genuine demigod!
While dealing with Hisoka was Lumian's personal grudge, Major Arcana card holders would also take notice, given Hisoka's potential alignment with that Celestial Worthy.
Lumian chuckled.
"No need for a Demon Hunter to intervene directly. I wonder if they can craft charms, potions, or items concealing malice. If so, we can spend a hefty sum through the Tarot Club's connections to acquire them or engage in item exchange."
"Start inquiring soon," Franca advised. "If Hisoka is a Desire Apostle, be cautious. You carry too many random items, and some mystical items have adverse effects on emotions and desires. He could detonate them, injuring you instantly..."
As she spoke, Franca's lips trembled before she sealed them shut.
Lumian nodded solemnly, refraining from boasting about his Ascetic abilities.
Having recently endured an explosion of emotions and desires, he understood it was beyond the endurance of an Ascetic, causing physical damage to the brain.
Franca then said, "The one chasing the Serial Killer was from the Numinous Episcopate, not a regular patrol member. The currents in Matani run deep."
The Numinous Episcopate, a clandestine organization in the Southern Continent, was rumored to trace its origins to the former royal descendants of the Balam Empire and Beyonders unwilling to forsake Death as their faith. Their ultimate aim was to restore Death to His throne, ruling East and West Balam once more.
Lumian strolled to the window, gazing at the street. He grinned and commented,
"This is the chaotic Southern Continent.
"Actually, what piques my interest is why the Rose School of Thought is collecting information about the daily lives of Port Pylos residents. It seems like they want to govern this place.
"That's not their usual style."
Lumian had limited knowledge of the Rose School of Thought's past. All he knew was their recent spree of sacrifices, leaving bloodshed wherever they occupied. Running a city or port for extended periods didn't align with their usual behavior.
"Nothing is certain." Franca's mind was working overtime recently. After a moment's reflection, she added, "Regardless of the Rose School of Thought's motives, considering the sacrifices they've

conducted in recent years, they should have gained substantial boons from the Mother Tree of Desire. Now, with Devil family members in the mix, encountering a significant Rose School of Thought member may mean dealing with a dual Bearer of potions and boons. Perhaps a Zombie Recipient, Wraith Tree Spirit, or Sex Addict Apostle? Similar to a Hunter Monk like you."

Franca, always more adept at nicknames and unconventional thoughts than Lumian, playfully referred to Beyonders who were both Zombies and Recipients as Zombie Recipients.

Her primary intention was to caution Lumian that certain Rose School of Thought members might exploit abilities like those of the Sex Addict to provoke his desires. Later, in their Desire Apostle form, they could detonate those desires, providing end-to-end service.

It would be a formidable challenge. In Lumian's condition, facing such Beyonders posed considerable danger.

Lumian chuckled, somewhat self-deprecatingly.

Why do I feel like a powder keg, ready to explode with the slightest touch?

"Nevertheless, I don't intend to meddle in the Rose School of Thought's affairs. I'll write to Madam Magician and report the traces of the Rose School of Thought in Port Pylos. Someone will investigate and handle it. Aren't Mr. Star and Mr. Moon among the Major Arcana card holders overseeing the Rose School of Thought?

"My sole focus is Hisoka. At least, we can be sure that even if he's of the Devil pathway, he likely has no connection to the Andariel family. Otherwise, the Rose School of Thought wouldn't have dispatched Bram and company for reconnaissance. Bram wouldn't have been oblivious if a family member had been active here."

Franca hesitated for a moment before adding, "Hmm, just be careful."

...

Having escorted Franca back to Trier, Lumian stowed away Bram's Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic.

It took the form of a sharp-edged, prismatic ice cube, enveloping faint wisps of thin black gas.

Upon reaching Hotel Orella, Lumian approached the trio of mechanical elevators, pulled the handle, and stood patiently.

With a creak, the double doors opened simultaneously.

Lumian's silhouette, elongated by the crystal chandelier behind him, was mirrored in the mechanical lift.

Beside him stood a slender human shadow.

Chapter 639: Bribe

Lumian stood before the open mechanical elevator door, casting a glance at the slender shadow beside him. With raised eyebrows, he calmly turned his head, noting the sudden presence diagonally behind him.

The figure appeared as a tall, thin man draped in a complex, layered black robe. His face bore a pale-white complexion, as though untouched by sunlight for an extended period. Atop his black hair sat a fluffy black hat, its edge adorned with a gently swaying white feather.

Lumian retracted his gaze and entered the mechanical elevator. The tall, thin man with dark brown eyes following suit in silence.

Gripping the brass handle within with his right hand, Lumian selected the desired floor, pressing it down to B3, a definitive click echoing in response.

After Lumian selected his intended floor, the lanky man mimicked his action, opting for B18.

As they awaited descent, the distant sound of steam hissing reached their ears. Gears whirred to life, chains tightened, and the luxurious mechanical elevator began its gradual descent.

Throughout the journey, both remained eerily silent, the atmosphere thick with unspoken tension.

Upon arrival at B3, Lumian departed without a backward glance, heading towards Suite 7 with purpose.

As the metal chains continued their retreat behind him, Lumian muttered thoughtfully to himself, Monsieur Iveljsta?

Iveljsta, residing in B18, harbored lifeless servants.

The peculiar appearance of Iveljsta and the condition of his servants led Lumian to suspect his association with a Wraith, a Sequence 5 Wraith of the Prisoner pathway.

The Prisoner pathway, controlled by the Rose School of Thought, held sway over temperance and indulgence factions, both intertwined with the secret organization. It seemed unlikely for a Wraith not to be affiliated with the Rose School of Thought.

Could it be a rare rogue Wraith, or perhaps the vanguard of the Rose School of Thought targeting Port Pylos? Lumian couldn't discount the possibility of a temperance faction member. Yet, in the past few minutes, he discerned no evidence of Iveljsta's protracted indulgence... Lumian resolved to detail his observations in Madam Magician's letter.

Whether something was good or bad would be determined by professionals!

Returning to Suite 7, Lumian noticed Ludwig seated at the dining

table, indulging in a feast from a ceramic soup pot with a silver spoon.
Atop the dish, a layer of cheese infused with egg juice charred in spots. Through the substantial hole Ludwig had carved, Lumian glimpsed a medley of pork, beef, fish, shrimp, shells, potatoes, and tomatoes stewed together. The rich aroma of spices mingled with the meats' essence permeated the living and dining rooms, casting a spell that stirred his appetite.
Ludwig continued to eat in silence as Lugano stood up and asked, "Would you like some? This is the local Eseo. Different chefs choose different ingredients, and the taste will vary."
Ludwig, without uttering a word, simply turned his head at Lugano before resuming his meal, quickening his pace.
Taking a seat beside Ludwig, Lumian smiled at the cheese-filled boy and said, "I was going to bring you a better supper, but I thought better of it."
Confused, Lugano inquired, "What supper?"
"You don't want to know," Lumian responded with a Devil-like smile.
The supper he alluded to was Serial Killer Bram's corpse.
Originally intending to bring a few pieces back for Ludwig to sample and discern any "nutrients" and information, Lumian reconsidered, aware of Bram's limited knowledge about the Andariel family's peculiarities. Thus, he abandoned the idea of feeding Ludwig out of prudence.
From Lumian's observations, Ludwig could derive some strength from eating, releasing the seal. However, consuming a Sequence 7 Beyonder corpse might trigger a significant change. Lumian feared his own strength might not suffice to manage potential complications; Ludwig could potentially turn the tables and consume him as a delicacy.
Ludwig's silver spoon paused briefly before he remarked, "If you didn't bring it, why did you mention it?"
Oh, having a little tantrum? Lumian chuckled inwardly and said, "It's to inform you that we've reached an adventurer's paradise, a land of chaos. You'll have ample opportunities for fine dining in the future."
The implication was clear: do well, and I'll remember to reward you with delicacies.
Ludwig, spooning a soft potato stew into his mouth, responded vaguely, "I'm not going to school."
Does this mean that as long as he doesn't go to school, everything else is negotiable? Of course, the prerequisite is that I have to pay with enough delicacies... Satisfied, Lumian rose and made his way

to the washroom adjoining the master bedroom, where he washed up.
The brass faucet delivered warm water at a comfortable temperature.
Lumian soaked a towel, relishing the refreshing steam that enveloped his face, invigorating him.
Hotel Orella's utilization of a steam engine to power its mechanical elevators and machinery ensured continuous hot water, a notable feature of its service.
...
The following morning, Lumian, sporting a golden straw hat, appeared on Cania Street beside Port Pylos's Resurrection Square.
Once the ruling center for Intis colonists in Matani, the area bore remnants of its history with road signs and shop names in the Intisian language. Lumian effortlessly traced the path beneath the Intis parasol trees, arriving at a four-story beige house showcasing Intis's opulent architectural style.
Signs adorned in Dutanese, Intisian, Highlander, Loen, and Feysac languages marked the building: "Port Pylos Patrol Team."
Below the sign, five lines had the same meaning: "Only deals with paranormal events."
Fully taking into account the needs of adventurers from different countries to report a case... Lumian playfully remarked as he entered the beige establishment.
Within the hall, devoid of occupants, Lumian found a receptionist casually perusing the day's local tabloid from a lounging position.
The native, in his thirties with dark brown skin and black hair, possessed a slender face and dark brown eyes.
Approaching, Lumian addressed him in Intisian, "I want to report a case."
The native glanced up, rising unsteadily. He opened a partition behind him, uttering a few incomprehensible words in Dutanese.
Lumian could barely understand him speaking in Dutanese.
"Someone who understands Intisian or Highlander..."
This won't do. Since you don't understand foreign languages, don't waste time reading the newspaper. Study diligently... Maintaining a genial smile, he patiently awaited other patrol team members to appear.
Within a mere minute or two, a young man with fluffy brown hair, appearing as if he had fallen asleep without washing his hair the night before, swung open the door from the depths of the hall.
Dressed in a white shirt and an unbuttoned yellow vest, he strolled towards Lumian, one hand casually tucked into his pocket. In fluent Intisian, he inquired, "What case are you filing?"

Lumian assessed the young man, unmistakably hailing from the Northern Continent, cigarette in hand, and brownish-yellow eyes. With a reserved smile, Lumian responded, "I found a killer."

Amused, the well-defined young man gestured towards the door. "For killers, go to the police on the opposite street."

Opposite the patrol team stood Port Pylos's police headquarters.

Maintaining his composure, Lumian reiterated, "He's a serial killer."

Serial killer... The young man with the cigarette muttered to himself, a shift in his demeanor indicating a sudden seriousness.

"How do you know?"

"I found many severed lips in his house—human lips," Lumian disclosed with a reserved smile.

"Cut off lips?" The young man, yet to fasten his yellow vest, pressed with urgency, "Where's his home?"

After a brief pause, Lumian replied, "I can't spell the street name, but I can take you to the scene. It's on a street near the Man-Eating Flower bar."

Forcing himself to calm down, the young man took a drag on his cigarette, asking, "What about the killer? Did you see his face?"

"He's dead," Lumian truthfully responded.

Taken aback for a moment, the brown-haired young man queried, "How did he die?"

Lumian's reserved smile transformed into a more open one. "I killed him."

The young man's expression froze in disbelief.

He scrutinized Lumian for a few seconds before inquiring, "Are you an adventurer here to collect the bounty?"

Bram's serial murders had prompted a local wanted poster issued by Admiral Querarill. However, the poster lacked a corresponding name or appearance, featuring only a case description due to the suspect's unidentified status.

Smiling, Lumian replied, "Sort of, but you can also claim it."

The young man furrowed his brow. "What do you mean?"

"The bounty can be yours," Lumian stated, making his intention to bribe clear.

The young man cast a glance at Lumian. "What would you like in exchange?"

"I want the dossier on a serial murder case from four years ago and the relevant items you gathered," Lumian disclosed openly.

There might be something among them that Ludwig could consume.

The young man fell into contemplative silence, assessing the pros and cons.
Eventually, he scratched his brown hair and said, "I can show you the case dossier and related items, but you can't take them away. You can only copy them.
"Also, I need to confirm if it's a Serial Killer at the scene."
"Alright," Lumian agreed, extending his right hand with a smile. "Happy working with you."
The young man shook Lumian's hand.
"Nice working with you. You can call me Camus. What about you?"
Lumian smiled once more.
"Louis Berry."
As Camus entered the door deep in the hall, preparing to gather two teammates, he pondered, Louis Berry... Why does this name sound familiar...

Chapter 640: Commonality

On the street adorned with the words "Chilicasco" in Dutanese, Lumian led Camus and the rest of the patrol team into the apartment crafted from dark black stones and brown wood.

The moment he swung open the door to Bram's room, a blend of charred scent and the tang of blood wafted through the air.

Corpse fragments lay strewn across the floor, the walls tainted with a mixture of blood and flesh. Handprints, crimson and searing marks adorned every surface.

Camus's eyes widened, as if thrust back into the midst of a serial killing.

Yet, this was a level of devastation beyond even that.

Turning to Lumian, Camus, despite already anticipating the grim answer, habitually inquired, "Where's that person's body?"

Lumian gestured towards the scattered remains and minced meat, responding with a grim smile, "All of these."

Camus fell into a momentary silence before signaling his two stunned teammates to examine the scene.

He had promised to share a portion of the bounty with them, making them witnesses to his "merits."

Camus hadn't ventured alone, wary that this might be a trap set by Louis Berry, an assassination attempt by the Rose School of Thought, or other secret organizations targeting the patrol team.

In the Southern Continent, vigilance was a necessity!

Approaching a cupboard, Camus fixated his gaze on lips soaked in preservatives, the tragic fate of the victims replaying in his mind.

After a moment of silence, Louis Berry spoke calmly, "Bram is a member of the Devil family, Andariel. He was instructed by the Rose School of Thought to gather information in Port Pylos and carry out the serial murders. His uncle, Devajo, was supposed to be his contact, but they never actually met. Instead, he left the information he collected in the study of an empty house at 17 Aleg Street..."

Wh-- Camus and the others were initially startled, then deeply puzzled.

How does Louis Berry possess such detailed knowledge?

Camus couldn't help but glance at the scattered corpse pieces, the blood-soaked walls, the handprints on the ground, and the various charred marks.

Eventually, his gaze settled on Lumian's face.

Lumian responded with a warm smile curling his lips.

Camus and his two companions exchanged glances, refraining from questioning whether Louis Berry obtained the information

through spirit channeling, torture, or if he had discerned Bram's motives from the start. Louis's pursuit of the serial murderer wasn't solely due to a criminal act.
"This intel is crucial," Camus nodded, gesturing towards the severely damaged six-barrel machine gun in the room. "We need to secure Bram's weapon."
"No problem," Lumian replied casually.
Being a Pyromaniac, firearms held little appeal for him. Fireballs proved far more potent than the rapid fire of a six-barrel machine gun--just not as swift.
...
Beside Resurrection Square, on Cania Street, on the second floor of the patrol team's four-story building.
Camus placed the dossier and related items on the table in front of Lumian, emphasizing, "You can only read and record. Taking it away or damaging it is not an option."
Lumian nodded subtly, taking one of the envelopes, unwinding the thread a few times, and carefully opening it.
Rather than hastily perusing the contents, he first extracted the dossier, giving it a thorough read.
The dense dossier meticulously outlined the identities, origins, possible pathways, Sequences, locations of death, the scene's conditions, and the varied speculations and investigations conducted by the patrol team.
It was clear the patrol team had been diligent in their investigations, especially when new victims kept emerging. Daily operations varied until the serial murders appeared to cease, leading to a slackening of efforts. They gradually reduced the frequency of case studies and large-scale visit trips. After six months, investigations reached a standstill, concluding the dossier.
In the final report, the vice-captain overseeing the matter concluded: "This is a classic serial murder case committed by the Devil pathway. Though Serial Killers seldom target only seven individuals, as more victims enhance the ritual's efficacy, this time, all victims are Beyonders, including Mid-Sequence Beyonders. Even with just seven deaths, they are more favored by Devils, pleasing them more than 14 or even 20 ordinary people.
"The main question in this mystic case is that, aside from being Beyonders, there's no common thread among the seven victims. This sets it apart from previous serial murders.
"We hypothesize that the seven victims were active Beyonders in West Balam, likely having committed some form of killing in the past. It can be seen as a manifestation of depravity..."

Lumian read it meticulously, concurring with the theory that seven Beyonders surpassed 14 ordinary individuals in Devil-pleasing rituals.

This wasn't new information to him. After all, ordinary people were only the third-best sacrifice, while creatures with Beyonder characteristics ranked second.

Similar situations arose in specific "acts," particularly those requiring feedback. It was akin to deciphering an Angel's conspiracy, allowing Lumian to assimilate a potion more effectively than an ordinary person's intrigue.

Having grasped a general understanding of the entire serial murder case, Lumian delved into gathering information about the seven Beyonders. Synthesizing Anthony's psychological profile of Hisoka, Franca's archetype summary and her speculations about the actor, he scoured for potential commonalities.

Among the Beyonders were both men and women, one under Admiral Querarill, while another was a Death believer residing in Port Pylos. Foreign adventurers, an Intis Republic spy stationed in Matani, a peripheral member of the Rose School of Thought, and a local clergyman of the God of Steam and Machinery Church were also among the list.

Judging by their identities and backgrounds, they seemingly had nothing in common.

Yet, for Lumian, who read with subjective conjectures, subtle details held significance.

All seven victims were young, with the oldest in his early thirties, widely praised for combat talent and outstanding intelligence. Lumian mused to himself,

Are the targets Beyonders who are young, filled with potential, and have already reached a certain level of maturity? Even the two who weren't particularly young bore the label of being famous, powerful, with limitless potential... Lumian gained a rough understanding of Hisoka's selection criteria.

If Franca were present, she might have noted that it matched the characteristics of the original archetype.

However, Lumian believed Hisoka would adhere to the archetype when it suited him, not letting it dictate his true motives. Mad Lady's evaluation of Hisoka as not being pure enough further supported Lumian's perspective.

Considering the selection criteria, Lumian thought, Louis Berry fits Hisoka's homicidal fetish. He clicked his tongue and retrieved items related to the case from the official envelopes.

Most were the victim's belongings, but there were also seven thin aluminum foils stained with blackish-brown substances that

didn't belong to this group.
Described in the case file, they were wrappings for the local chocolate, left at each crime scene. It was suspected that the murderer would peel off the thin foil after success, indulging in a piece of chocolate before dissecting the corpse.
As the murderer used a gloved hand to extract and consume the chocolate, no corresponding traces were left on the thin foil. Such chocolates were common in Matani, making tracking difficult.
Lumian studied the thin aluminum foil before smiling at Camus, who supervised him.
"Can I take two or three?"
Camus, with his brown hair, furrowed his brow.
"If you want to use divination or other Beyonder methods, you can do it here."
"Just two. It won't hinder your future investigations," Lumian said enticingly. "If you agree to help, I'll give you an additional reward. For example, a very useful summoning incantation for a spirit world creature."
Camus fell silent briefly before agreeing, "Deal."
...
More than fifteen minutes later, Camus, having brought Lumian out to purchase chocolate-like items, observed with a bewildered expression as a rabbit-shaped spirit world creature adeptly copied the dossiers with a fountain pen.
After nearly a minute, Camus shifted his gaze to Lumian, leisurely sitting on the side, peeling off the thin aluminum foil and savoring a piece of dark-brown chocolate. He inquired in a deep voice, "Is this the very useful spirit world creature you mentioned?"
Lumian, chewing on the fragrant chocolate, responded with a smile, "Yes, it's one of the Rabbits of Knowledge. It can help you evade the labor of copying."
What do I need such a copying tool for!? Camus bellowed inwardly, but he restrained himself as he recalled the bounty for the serial murders and the grisly scene of Bram's demise.
Lumian added with a smile, "When you prefer to keep the origin of your words hidden, summon the Rabbit of Knowledge for assistance.
"Moreover, this is a growth-oriented spirit world creature. It evolves based on the knowledge it receives. Of course, it's ideal if you can secure a contract with the spirit world creature. Otherwise, each summoned Rabbit of Knowledge might differ, making nurturing impossible."
"Growth-oriented..." Camus echoed the term, his expression gradually softening.

...
Back at Hotel Orella, Lumian retrieved the two old aluminum foils from his pocket and handed one to Ludwig.
"Try eating these," he suggested with a smile.

Chapter 641: Information From Eating

Lugano, who had been observing from the sidelines, was taken aback when Lumian handed the thin aluminum foil to Ludwig and inquired if he wanted to eat it.

Despite Ludwig's previous display of abnormal eating habits, including drinking a tube of human blood in front of Lugano, revealing all the corresponding information, Lugano still harbored reservations about feeding Ludwig just anything, especially something as unconventional as aluminum foil.

After all, Ludwig was still a child!

In the blink of an eye, Lugano witnessed Ludwig silently accepting the old, thin aluminum foil, stuffing it into his mouth, chewing, and swallowing.

"..." Lugano found himself in a daze.

Once Ludwig finished consuming the aluminum foil, he calmly turned to Lumian and inquired, "Which details do you need--information on the cocoa beans used, the precise quantity, additional ingredients, the origin of the aluminum foil ingredients, the production factories, or the individuals most in contact with it?"

Lumian shook his head slowly.

"No need."

This information wouldn't help track down Hisoka. Hisoka had touched the thin aluminum foil while wearing gloves, leaving behind no corresponding personal details. The patrol team had already confirmed that the chocolate packaging was common in Port Pylos, and there was nothing distinctive about the taste.

As Lumian responded, a mix of amusement and surprise washed over him.

He can even extract such information from eating?

As expected of a monster capable of recovering just by eating and gradually breaking free from the seal's constraints!

Ludwig seemed to relish the delicacy. After a few moments, he remarked, "The residual chocolate has a hint of depravity."

Depravity? Could it be that Hisoka had carried it for an extended period, corrupting it? That doesn't make sense. Unless one was a demigod, Beyonder auras couldn't reach such a level. The only possibility was that they were on the brink of losing control, deep in a state of depravity. However, such a Beyonder's body would undoubtedly display various abnormal details. They wouldn't be able to leave the house; stepping out would lead to discovery and pursuit by law enforcers. Could he rely on the human skin Bram mentioned for disguise? Lumian was initially puzzled, but then he

asked with anticipation, "A decadent aura from the Devil pathway?"
Ludwig licked his lips, savoring the taste of the chocolate residue. "Yes, at least a Demon's."
"Demon's?" Lumian was taken aback and couldn't help but frown. Having extensively studied Devilology, he knew that Sequence 4 of the Devil pathway was known as Demon, representing a demigod. If the chocolate slightly tainted with a decadent aura came from a Demon, it clearly didn't belong to Hisoka.
Lumian wasn't arrogantly dismissing Hisoka's potential to have advanced to Sequence 4. Instead, the aluminum foil and chocolate marks represented the state four years ago. Hisoka couldn't have been a Demon back then, unless he had become a Desire Apostle upon transmigration. If that were the case, his targets for the serial murders should have been Sequence 6 or 5 Beyonders.
Although Beyonders at this level were rare in Matani, Devilology didn't specify that serial murders could only occur in one location.
"Are you certain?" Lumian looked at Ludwig for confirmation.
Ludwig replied earnestly, "A Demon's decadent aura has a completely different texture from Low- to Mid-Sequence Devils."
Upon hearing his godson's response, an image suddenly surfaced in Lumian's mind.
Hisoka standing within the wall of spirituality, engaged in a special ritual to establish a connection with a Demon. Throughout this process, a few pieces of chocolate wrapped in thin aluminum foil remained in his pocket. They were slightly tainted by the decadent aura permeating the altar, subtly and silently transforming...
Yes, when I perform a ritual, I don't remove all my belongings in advance and leave them outside the altar unless there's a specific mention in the ritual requirements that I should avoid... As a Conspirer, Lumian quickly made a guess and asked Ludwig, "Can you tell which Demon's decadent aura it belongs to?"
Lumian's current idea was that if Hisoka couldn't be found in the future, he would exhaust his resources and seek the help of the New City of Silver's Demon-Hunter experts. He would set up a ritual and summon the Demon who had established a connection with Hisoka. He would have it beaten up before interrogating it for information about Hisoka.
Ludwig shook his head.
"I can't absorb such subtle information yet. All I know is that the decadent aura belongs to a family called Nois."
Nois, one of the three Devil families... The Demon responding to Hisoka's special ritual is from the Nois family? That's peculiar.

How can a Demon respond to a ritual remotely? It has to be at Sequence 3, or even at the Angel level... According to Devilology, Serial Killers can summon projections of Abyss Demons because those Devils can use the special properties of the Abyss to respond, not because they have reached the corresponding level. However, the Nois family is a Devil family active in the real world and hasn't entered the Abyss... Lumian made many connections from the Nois last name.
He concluded by listing three possibilities:
Firstly, the Demon responding to the Hisoka ritual was none other than the Nois family's Angel.
Secondly, it had reached Sequence 3 and was located in Port Pylos, near Hisoka.
Thirdly, the Nois family had a close connection to the Abyss. They could borrow the Abyss's properties to some extent. Even a Demon could respond to prayers from afar.
Lumian pondered for a moment and asked Ludwig, "Any other information?"
"No," Ludwig replied, disappointing Lumian.
Lumian handed over the remaining piece of aluminum foil.
"Try this one too."
Ludwig didn't hesitate. Like many children drawn to the sweetness lingering on wrappers, he popped the thin foil stained with chocolate into his mouth and chewed.
After a moment, while Lugano snapped back to reality, Ludwig looked at Lumian and remarked, "There's more to this one."
"What kind of information?" Lumian knew that Ludwig's special mention had to be of some value.
Ludwig responded with the air of a connoisseur, "This thin aluminum foil rested on a table marked by old blood and a splash of coffee. The blood belonged to a deceased male. The spirituality was initially potent, and the coffee was Fermo blend, unsweetened, distinctly bitter yet fragrant."
Upon hearing Ludwig's account, Lumian's mind painted another vivid scene.
A few pieces of chocolate wrapped in thin aluminum foil lay nonchalantly on a table, soaked in old blood and spilled coffee. They seemed to share an intimate connection for an extended period. Then, a hand reached out, snatched them up, and swiftly pocketed them before making a hasty exit.
Connecting the dots, Lumian strongly suspected that the table had served Hisoka in a dwelling he once occupied.
"Do you have detailed information on the male deceased?" Lumian probed Ludwig for more insights.

Ludwig shook his head once more.
"No, unless I consume the blood directly."
14:53
The bloodstains likely belonged to one of the victims, Lumian surmised. He pondered whether this information was documented in the case file or elsewhere. Was Hisoka using "No, unless I consume the blood directly."
The bloodstains likely belonged to one of the victims, Lumian the table as an autopsy platform or perhaps an altar? Lumian mused inwardly, a tinge of disappointment clouding his thoughts. Nevertheless, he refocused his attention on the Fermo coffee.
He mumbled to himself, Does this mean that Hisoka has a penchant for coffee, specifically the Fermo blend from the Paz Valley...
The Paz Valley, nestled in the Southern Continent, boasted the renowned Fermo coffee, comparable to Feynapotter's highlander coffee and the Southern Continent's own version. It was a luxury enjoyed mainly by the middle class for extended periods.
In Matani, where both East and West Balam produced high-quality coffee beans, such occurrences were rare. The locals had access to a plethora of excellent coffee beans. Those unfit for export were sold at affordable prices, favored by both colonists and natives.
Lugano, now fully attentive, cautiously added, "I've heard that those who frequent Fermo coffee appreciate its bitterness and fragrance. However, those who prefer it without sugar are a rare breed."
In essence, Hisoka's unique taste in coffee is uncommon here... Lumian smiled at Ludwig and remarked, "Well done. If I apprehend the target in the future, I'll give him to you."
When the time came, Lumian would likely be a Sequence 5. Moreover, he wouldn't give Ludwig the Beyonder characteristic. Lumian could ease his grip on the boy.
Give... The notion sent a chill down Lugano's spine, a hint that his imagination might have run too wild.
To others, gifting a Beyonder of the Devil's Pathway might relegate the recipient to a life of servitude or worse, becoming an ingredient. However, with Ludwig...
Lugano involuntarily shuddered.
He didn't dare to think about it!
Ludwig nodded, his eyes gleaming with anticipation.
Lumian turned to Lugano and said, "Don't you have a good grasp of Dutanese? Check Port Pylos this afternoon and find out which shops sell Fermo coffee. It's preferable if it's one that has been

operating for four to five years or longer."
"Alright." Lugano suddenly felt a surge of usefulness.
In the evening, he returned to Suite 7 at B3 and reported to Lumian, "There are only three shops selling Fermo coffee. One is on Cania Street in Resurrection Square..."
"You mentioned Cania Street in Resurrection Square?" Lumian interjected.
"Yes, Unit 21 on that street. It's called Matani Import and Export Shop," Lugano confirmed.
Lumian fell silent.
Isn't it close to Port Pylos's patrol team?
.....
In Port Pylos, on the third floor of the building housing the patrol team.
Camus received the bounty and gave a fifth to his two companions.
He then entered the telegraph room and inquired of the telegrapher, "Do you have a telegram for me?"
He had previously sent a telegram to inquire with certain friends if they had any information on Louis Berry, the adventurer.
Since they were in collaboration, he needed to ascertain the other party's situation first!
The female telegrapher, wearing a sweet smile, straightened up and responded, "Yes! From Farim."

Chapter 642: Visit

Camus extended his thanks to the telegrapher, retrieved his telegram, and swiftly scanned its contents.

"Louis Berry, Intisian, hailed as the most renowned adventurer in the Fog Sea over the past six months. Sporting a distinctive golden straw hat, he successfully hunted down the Demon Warlock Burman, earning a hefty bounty of 600,000 verl d'or. Furthermore, he collaborated with the Earth Mother Church in Port Santa to address the crisis surrounding the Sea Prayer Ritual. However, the precise details remain elusive..."

Upon perusing the telegram, Camus released a silent sigh and remarked to himself, He's truly a great adventurer. It's no surprise he managed to handle that Serial Killer...

Camus couldn't gauge the Demon Warlock's true strength, but the substantial bounty spoke volumes. The sum of 600,000 verl d'or was a testament to the Demon Warlock's threat level. Even if Louis Berry's fame stemmed solely from his encounter with such a formidable adversary, he undeniably stood among the great adventurers.

It wasn't lost on Camus that Bram, the perpetrator of numerous murders that had kept the patrol team occupied for nearly two weeks, only carried a bounty of 50,000 verl d'or. Such figures tempted Camus to consider collaboration with Louis Berry.

Reflecting on the substantial 600,000 bounty and comprehending Louis Berry's generosity, Camus tucked away the telegram and graciously commended the female telegrapher with an exaggerated flying kiss.

Running his fingers through his tousled brown hair, Camus descended to the hall below.

The evening had descended, and it wasn't his night for duty. He could head home and take a break.

Out of the blue, Camus's gaze focused as he spotted the handsome Louis Berry, sporting black hair, green eyes, and a laid-back demeanor, seated on the sofa, casually playing with a golden straw hat.

Approaching cautiously, Camus inquired, "Is there anything else?"

Lumian ceased twirling the straw hat, sat up straight, and grinned.

"I've got something else to talk to you about."

Realizing that one of the three shops that could buy Fermo coffee was on Cania Street, not far from the patrol team, Lumian's immediate thought was:

Could Hisoka be hiding within the patrol team, perhaps as one of its

members?
Is the most dangerous place the safest?
After careful consideration, Lumian considered it a possibility, though not particularly likely.
On the one hand, among the seven Beyonders who were killed, including the Death believer in Port Pylos, the Rose School of Thought's peripheral member, and the spy left behind in Matani by the Intis Republic, were secretive individuals, blending in with ordinary people. Without substantial information sources, it would be challenging for Hisoka to identify them as Beyonders and target them.
This suggested that either Hisoka had a unique ability to discern Beyonders from ordinary people or possessed a mystical item granting him such insight, or he had control over an extensive information network. The patrol team, being intimately familiar with Matani and Port Pylos, might have already detected something amiss with the Death believer, the Rose School of Thought's member, and the Intis spy and been conducting surveillance.
Hisoka's membership in the patrol team would explain his ability to uncover a Beyonder's hidden identity and carry out the murders.
On the other hand, if Hisoka, a Devil pathway Beyonder, had joined the patrol team, suspicions would undoubtedly arise once the serial murders occurred—unless he concealed his true pathway from the start. However, the patrol team differed from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Hisoka would need to use his abilities frequently during daily missions, making it difficult to conceal them for months or years.
There was no room for mishaps. It wasn't feasible for him to meticulously prepare before each mission, adorning the corresponding mystical item solely to reveal his abilities in that specific situation, right?
Even as a Devil, he couldn't pull it off!
Given that many missions had no specific target, Devils couldn't foresee imminent danger.
Driven by suspicion and uncertainty, Lumian took a special trip to the patrol team, visiting Camus to unearth new clues or gain inspiration to either confirm or eliminate the corresponding possibilities.
"What do you want to discuss?" Camus furrowed his brow.
Is this guy scheming to use the morning's bribe as leverage to threaten me?
The dossier isn't particularly important. Even if I lose it, it's just a minor punishment!

Wearing his golden straw hat, Lumian rose with a smile. Pointing at the door, he suggested, "How about a cup of coffee?"
After a brief contemplation, Camus responded in a deep voice, "Fine."
Exiting the patrol team's entrance, Lumian made his way toward the Matani Import and Export Shop.
In the fading dusk, he immediately spotted Port Pylos's police headquarters diagonally opposite the patrol team.
Numerous individuals clad in dark-blue police uniforms moved in and out, some holding cups of coffee.
Wh— Lumian's heart stirred.
Could Hisoka not be a member of the patrol team but a high-ranking police officer at the police headquarters?
At a certain rank, the police collaborated with official Beyonders to access a wealth of information. Many official Beyonders' investigations were conducted through the police due to limited manpower.
If Hisoka held a significant position at Port Pylos's police headquarters, it was plausible for him to identify the three concealed Beyonders. Additionally, there would be no risk of exposing his pathway during routine missions, and acquiring his favored Fermo coffee beans would be a breeze.
On the other hand, it was precisely because the Matani Import and Export Shop offered a variety of coffee beans that Hisoka fell in love with the pure, bitter, and fragrant Fermo coffee without sugar.
However, this was just one possibility among Lumian's speculations. For instance, Hisoka, being a bold and self- assured individual, might have visited Cania Street specifically to buy Fermo coffee, relishing the incompetence and frustration of the patrol team. Alternatively, Hisoka might not be a Beyonder of the Devil pathway but simply possessed the corresponding Sealed Artifact and had mastered a unique ritual to appease Devils. There was also the chance that Lumian was mistaken—Hisoka might not be linked to the serial murders four years ago.
With these thoughts in mind, Lumian contained his excitement and entered the Matani Import and Export Shop alongside Camus. They reached the section where various coffee beans were on display and secured a seat in the attached coffee shop.
"Highlander coffee with milk and two cubes of sugar," Camus ordered from the waiter with a sense of familiarity.
Lumian, on the other hand, opted for a cup of fragrant Intis coffee.
While waiting, Lumian casually observed the coffee choices of other customers. Turning to Camus, he inquired, "Judging by the

name, are you a Feynapotterian?"
Camus hesitated briefly before truthfully responding, "My full name is Don Givré Camus Castiya."
He was willing to share his full name as the telegram mentioned Louis Berry having a good working relationship with the Church of Earth Mother.
Lumian chuckled.
"So, you're a noble lord."
The name Castiya belonged to the royal family of the Feynapotter Kingdom, and "Don" at the beginning of Camus's name signified "Honorable," representing his noble status.
Camus smiled wryly and remarked, "If I were truly a nobleman, why would I join a local patrol team in the Southern Continent?
"Our branch has long dwindled, but I can't deny that this last name and the Don prefix have provided me with advantages beyond those of ordinary people. I received a potion upon reaching adulthood, achieving Sequence 9 Beyonder status. However, my subsequent advancements were the result of my own efforts."
Accepting my 50,000 verl d'or bribe is part of your efforts? Lumian teased inwardly. He glanced at the two cups of coffee brought by the waiter, feigning casualness as he asked, "Don't you want to try some other coffees? Is highlander coffee your only choice?"
Camus raised his cup and took a sip. "I'm accustomed to its taste."
Lumian removed his golden straw hat and took a sip, smiling as he replied, "Fair enough. Just like how I can never acclimate to Fermo coffee. It's too bitter with regular sugar, and too cloying with too much. Some people appreciate the bitterness and fragrance of Fermo coffee, opting for just a hint of sugar."
Lumian anticipated Camus to respond with, "Yes, some even drink Fermo coffee without sugar." However, Camus's reply didn't align with his expectations.
"That's how it goes. What's on your mind?"
Internally exhaling, Lumian spoke openly, "As you can tell, I'm deeply intrigued by the serial murder case from four years ago. It's my sole purpose in Port Pylos—a highly valuable assignment."
"Highly valuable? It's just a Serial Killer." Camus let out a sigh of relief upon realizing Louis Berry was interested in discussing this matter.
Even if he were blind, he could tell Louis Berry's genuine concern about the serial murders four years prior.
Lumian vaguely explained with a smile, "This case holds secrets beyond your wildest imagination."
For example, transmigrators, or that Celestial Worthy...
Camus took another sip of his highlander coffee and reflected.

"I arrived in Matani over five years ago. At that time, the Intisians had just departed, and the kingdom and the Church's forces had completed their initial infiltration. I sensed numerous opportunities, thinking I could leverage my last name to secure a prominent position. Hence, I took a ship across the Fog Sea. The outcome differed from my expectations, but it was still acceptable."
Camus, in his mid-twenties, sighed as he recounted the past.
He continued, "When the case unfolded, I was merely a Sequence 8. Alongside a few teammates, I followed Vice-
Captain Reaza to investigate."
He paused, offering Lumian a smile that seemed to convey, "If you want more information, show more sincerity."
In that moment, Lumian was contemplating another question.
If Hisoka truly belongs to the Devil pathway and has joined the patrol team, is there a way for him to conceal his identity?
Putting himself in those shoes, Lumian realized that concealing the abilities of the Hunter pathway wouldn't pose a problem.
Most situations could be handled with the Ascetic pathway's abilities and a couple of items.
Of course, the usage of an Ascetic's abilities was suspicious.
Could it be that Hisoka is indeed a bestowed individual who typically exhibits powers from the boon pathway? Lumian raised his cup and took a sip of coffee, avoiding delving into the details of the serial murders. He gazed at Camus thoughtfully and inquired, "Do you have members in the patrol team skilled in divination or decryption?"

Chapter 643: Target Suspect

Camus couldn't comprehend why Louis Berry had abruptly changed the topic and neglected to charge for the pertinent information. Recollecting, he mentioned, "Yes, there's a Magician. He was initially an officer of the Admiral Guard but later got transferred to the patrol team."

Later... Lumian frowned slightly.

"When did he transfer to the patrol team?"

"Why do you ask? Last year," replied Camus. He had no clue about Louis Berry's inquiry, making it unclear what information was vital.

Last year... It doesn't seem to be Hisoka, judging by appearances... Although possibilities can't be completely ruled out. Serving as an officer in Admiral Querarill's guard provides opportunities for gathering intel. Perhaps he didn't purchase Fermo coffee from this Import Export Shop. It could be one of the other two cafes... Even so, there's a logical reason for buying it here. Yes, to relish watching the incompetence and frustration of the patrol team... Lumian temporarily placed the Magician on his suspect list.

He didn't dismiss the possibility that the other party was Hisoka just because they were a Sequence 7. This was because the level of a boon might not be the same as the level brought about by potions.

Furthermore, Lumian had vaguely perceived changes beneath Matani's surface from the Magician's departure from Admiral Querarill's guard to joining the patrol team.

Beyonders of the Seer pathway either originated from the Church of The Fool or were associated with Intis's Bureau 8 or secret organizations supporting Bureau 8, like the Secret Order. While there were wild Beyonders, very few evolved into Magicians. Coupled with Matani's history as an Intis colony, Lumian reasonably deduced that the Magician had close ties to the Intis Republic, a fact well-known to Admiral Querarill.

He retained the Magician in the guards to maintain a specific connection with Intis and handle the new Feynapotter Kingdom. By achieving a balance of power, he could better sustain his rule.

The Magician's departure from the Admiral Guard last year might indicate that Admiral Querarill had truly gauged the Feynapotter Kingdom's stance after years of collaboration and had sided with them.

Lumian's speculation didn't eliminate the suspicion that the Magician might be Hisoka. Loki, from Intis and a Secret Order member, held a mid-management position in Bureau 8. It was

entirely possible for him to use the proper channels to involve Hisoka in Bureau 8's overseas section and recruit him into the Secret Order.
After contemplating for a moment, Lumian inquired, "Does that Magician have a fondness for Fermo coffee?"
He didn't directly ask about the other party's name and characteristics.
Camus shook his head.
"He doesn't appreciate coffee. His preference leans towards sweet drinks like Gwadar."
Gwadar, a well-loved local beverage in West Balam, was crafted from locally grown berries and contained a certain amount of caffeine. It had the same impact as coffee in enhancing mental strength and combating fatigue. However, its hue was orange-yellow, with a hint of sweetness amidst the sourness. It served both to alleviate the sweltering heat and quench thirst.
Prefers sweetness... Lumian felt a sense of disappointment.
Four years ago, Hisoka had no inkling that he would confront a monster like Ludwig in the future. It was unlikely for him to deliberately splash some unsweetened Fermo coffee on the table with the chocolate. Lumian cautiously believed now that Hisoka truly enjoyed bitter coffee.
In that case, the Magician, with a sweet tooth, probably wasn't Hisoka. Unless Hisoka meticulously maintained the traits of each identity, consistently playing the role of a Magician who relished drinking Gwadar on a daily basis.
He wasn't an Actor who needed to meticulously perform every aspect of his daily life!
Moreover, he had no reason to digest Faceless!
As he contemplated, Lumian's heart skipped a beat.
Actor...
If Hisoka is genuinely a Beyonder of the Devil pathway, apart from his belief in the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings due to transmigration, he might also be influenced by the Mother Tree of Desire in his daily life.
Could it be that the boon of the Hisoka pathway doesn't come from one of the Celestial Worthy's Seer, Apprentice, or Marauder, but rather from the Mother Tree of Desire?
The current Celestial Worthy desires the invasion of evil gods into the world within the barrier. It's not implausible for Him to collaborate with the Mother Tree of Desire and tacitly permit Hisoka to exploit the Mother Tree of Desire...
With a fresh train of thought, Lumian observed the now-silent Camus and took a sip of Intis coffee, offering a smile as he

changed the subject.
"Any Beyonders from the Prisoner pathway in the patrol team?"
He had long suspected that the Mother Tree of Desire was an evil deity at the pinnacle of the Criminal, Prisoner, and Scrooge pathways. The corresponding boons likely originated from one of them or were intertwined.
Lumian refrained from asking about the existence of the Scrooge pathway because it was even more suspicious than the Criminal pathway, also known as the Devil pathway. It didn't belong to the twenty-two paths of the divine.
It was akin to a thief being apprehended by the police and asking in confusion, "I clearly disguised myself and left no traces. How did you quickly lock onto me," only to receive the answer, "This isn't Trier. No ordinary person would disguise themselves as a turkey and hide in a secluded alley."
"Do you think there's a spy from the Rose School of Thought in the patrol team?" Camus believed Louis Berry was casually raising the issue of the Rose School of Thought's interest in Port Pylos. "No, definitely not. He adheres to temperance and doesn't indulge at all."
Lumian smiled.
"In other words, there really is a Beyonder from the Prisoner pathway?"
"Yes, a Sequence 6 Zombie..." Camus confirmed.
Lumian interjected suddenly, "Don't disclose who he is, what he looks like, or his characteristics. Answer a few questions first."
"What questions?" Camus, feeling a bit disoriented from the rapidly changing topics, planned to decide when to ask for benefits later.
Lumian held a porcelain cup filled with Intis coffee and casually said, "When did he join the patrol team?"
"Half a year after me," Camus recalled.
You arrived in Matani over five years ago and joined the patrol team shortly after. Half a year later means that the Prisoner was already on the patrol team when the serial murder case occurred four years ago... Lumian's spirits lifted as he pondered for a moment.
"Did he face a catastrophe in the past and nearly died?"
"No." Camus shook his head. "At least, I don't know."
Lumian maintained his smile, showing no signs of disappointment, and said, "Does he have a liking for Fermo coffee?"
"Yes, he adores Fermo coffee and is the type who doesn't add sugar," replied Camus without much thought. Then, he remembered Louis Berry's inquiry about the Magician's preference for Fermo coffee in the patrol team.

He quickly formed a guess.
"Is there an issue with the ones enjoying Fermo coffee? Does the culprit of the serial murders four years ago have a taste for Fermo coffee? There are very few places in Port Pylos where you can get Fermo coffee. This is one of them. Even cafes selling Fermo coffee procure the beans from here... Are you suspecting that the murderer from four years ago is part of the patrol team?"
Impressive. You reacted swiftly and identified the core issue... Lumian inwardly praised Camus.
Simultaneously, a surge of joy filled his heart.
In Matani, Fermo coffee was a rare commodity, and those who preferred it without sugar were even rarer. Moreover, this individual was on the patrol team and seemingly from the Prisoner pathway!
With so many conditions aligning, Lumian felt like he had caught Hisoka by the tail!
To avoid triggering any sense of malice and danger, Lumian refrained from asking about the patrol team member's name, appearance, identity, or characteristics.
Feigning ignorance about the enemy, Lumian casually asked, "Is he from around here?"
Observing Camus's silence, Lumian added with a smile, "I won't claim the official bounty."
Camus's expression eased.
"He's a local of Port Pylos, born in Tizamo Town, which is part of Port Pylos."
Though the patrol team wasn't as stringent in member recruitment as the various Churches and governments, they still gathered basic information and conducted verifications. Otherwise, Admiral Querarill might have to worry about being assassinated by a patrol team member investigating a Beyonder case one day.
Tizamo Town... the location of one of Hisoka's pranks... It fits! Lumian controlled his excitement, preventing the corners of his mouth from curling up. Regrettably, he told Camus,
"Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be the target."
This was to prevent Camus from investigating the target.
This could potentially alert the other party to the corresponding malice!
"Alright." Camus shrugged.
Curious, he inquired, "How did you find out that the murderer from the serial killings four years ago liked Fermo coffee?"
"I was already aware of such a person before starting the investigation," Lumian replied with a meaningful tone.

He chose not to disclose that the information came from the thin aluminum foil wrapping of the chocolate. Revealing this might prompt Camus to believe he could uncover more clues and reignite the investigation, potentially drawing Hisoka's attention.

With this realization, Lumian understood something.

I should now be a target for Hisoka, but fishing has its benefits...

Louis Berry, adorned with a golden straw hat, had bribed members of the patrol team to examine the files of the serial murder case from four years ago. Other team members paid little attention, but if the Prisoner was indeed Hisoka, he would have detected Lumian—his adversary's investigation into the four-year-old serial murder case.

Hisoka refrained from taking action likely because Lumian openly presented himself as Louis Berry, making no effort to hide his identity. This led to the suspicion that Lumian was fishing, making Hisoka cautious of stepping into a potential trap. There was no sense of malice or danger perceived, as Lumian didn't possess details about the suspect's identity. Lumian was merely preparing for a potential surprise attack from a Devil or Desire Apostle.

Before, I fished to catch fish, but now my fishing is a bluff... Lumian's thoughts clarified as he looked at Camus and said,

"Keep an eye out for anyone at the police headquarters who enjoys Fermo coffee."

"Alright," Camus agreed, thinking that Louis Berry had identified the suspect as a member of the patrol team and the police through details he wasn't aware of. For now, the possibility of the patrol team members was tentatively ruled out.

After finishing the remaining Intis coffee and settling the bill with the corresponding verl d'or, Lumian donned the golden straw hat and maintained his smile. He left the Matani Import and Export Shop and Cania Street, step by step.

Passing by Port Pylos's police headquarters, he deliberately cast a few glances.

Chapter 644: Patrol Team

Camus stood at the entrance of the Matani Import and Export Shop, casually smoking a cigarette as he observed the passing customers. Despite his watchful eyes, he didn't spot anyone purchasing Fermo coffee.

As the gas street lamps gradually illuminated the surroundings, casting a dark blue hue across the sky, Camus extinguished his cigarette and tossed it into a nearby trash can. He then made his way back to the beige four-story building that housed the patrol team.

Originally planning to indulge in an Intis feast in a neighborhood frequented by foreigners to celebrate his unexpected windfall of 40,000 verl d'or, his plans were disrupted by Louis Berry. By the time he returned, it was already late, and he couldn't be bothered to wait for a top chef to prepare something special. Instead, he decided to return to the patrol team, pool money with his close teammates, and order takeout from a nearby restaurant. After satisfying his hunger, he intended to relax at a bar or dance hall.

While crossing the hall, Camus spotted a teammate with dark brown skin, thick lips, and a height exceeding 1.8 meters. Curious, he inquired, "Why did the guy in the straw hat come looking for you again?

"Heh, I heard you and the others caught a Serial Killer and got a bounty of 50,000 verl d'or?"

In Matani, the currency was commonly denoted in verl d'or and Delexi copper coins, a system ingrained during Intis colonization. Despite Admiral Querarill's control, there were no significant changes in this aspect. The only difference was a partnership with the Feynapotter Kingdom's bank that facilitated the free exchange of verl d'or and gold risot.

If he were one of the two teammates--either the Magician or the Zombie--whom Louis Berry had asked about, Camus would undoubtedly be on high alert. However, the person standing in front of him was Sow, a Sequence 8 Pugilist of the Warrior pathway. Sow had joined the patrol team as an adventurer just last year and was known for having a pleasant personality. Besides a bit of laziness and a love for enjoyment, there were no significant issues.

Camus laughed and said, "That's my informant. Without him, I wouldn't have received that much bounty."

Sow, with his single eyelids, had a realization.

"Did he come to you just now to get his share?"

Camus thought for a moment and replied, "That's one reason. The

other reason is that he's still investigating the serial murders from four years ago and wanted to ask me for some details."
He had kept the case dossier hidden from the captain and vice-captains of the patrol team, but he couldn't keep it from his teammates. Therefore, he had no intention of concealing Louis Berry's investigation into the serial murders from four years ago. Moreover, he planned to monitor the police headquarters to identify anyone who enjoyed Fermo coffee and seemed suspicious. He would need his teammates' assistance to some extent.
"Any progress? Any chance of claiming the bounty?" Sow, dressed in a pleated shirt and carrying a broadsword, displayed visible interest.
Camus wasn't ready to provide detailed information at the moment. He vaguely responded, "He suspects that the murderer might be hiding at the police headquarters from four years ago. I plan to investigate discreetly."
"Why do you think the murderer is a police officer?" Sow looked puzzled.
Camus hadn't discussed this with Lumian earlier, so he pondered for a moment and explained, "Consider this. In the case four years ago, only Beyonders were targeted. Several of them usually concealed their identities. How could the murderer accurately locate them and know that they were Beyonders?
"Only us or those from the police headquarters at a certain rank can access that kind of information. It's easier to verify if there are Beyonders of the Devil pathway on the patrol team."
Four years ago, during their investigation, Vice-Captain Reaza had proposed this idea. However, he only suspected that the Serial Killer was hiding within the patrol team and hadn't considered the police headquarters or the Admiral Guard. Subsequently, the patrol team conducted an investigation and found no suspicious individuals, leading them to shift their focus.
"I see a glimmer of hope and smell the fragrance of verl d'or," Sow said with anticipation. "If you need help, feel free to look for me. I heard that Kolobo and the others just followed you to the scene and each got 5,000 verl d'or!"
"No problem," Camus readily agreed.
Then, he walked past Sow and along the corridor toward his office.
At the door of his office, Kolobo poked his head out, observing the conversation between Camus and Sow.
Kolobo, about the same age as Camus, in his mid-twenties, had dark hair, azure eyes, and a slender figure. He held a pair of black sunglasses in his hand.
He lowered his voice and said to Camus, "Stay away from Sow for

the time being."
"Why?" Camus asked, surprised.
Observing Sow vanish through the door leading to the hall, Kolobo averted his gaze and explained,
"I have a feeling that something bad will happen if one interacts with him during this period."
"Then why didn't you warn him?" Camus frowned in confusion.
As a Sequence 8 Robot of the Monster pathway, Kolobo possessed formidable spiritual perception and could vaguely sense certain things.
"I warned him. He thinks everything's fine. I even reported it to the Captain." Kolobo shrugged.
As he spoke, the thin Beyonder recalled something.
"That adventurer, Louis Berry, is also dangerous. When I arrived at the scene this morning, I didn't dare to look directly at him. Occasionally, I would glance at him and see large amounts of blood, flames, and death.
"I didn't want to tell you at first. I felt that if I said it, fate would suffocate me. Phew, it actually seems okay to say it now. It seems I'm too sensitive."
That dangerous? As expected of a great adventurer who received a bounty of 600,000 verl d'or at once... While Camus, who knew about Louis Berry's deeds, wasn't overly shocked, this was the first time he had heard a Monster like Kolobo describe someone in such a way.
Camus patted Kolobo's shoulder.
"Thank you. I'll be careful."
With that settled, he asked curiously, "Was Louis Berry the first person to give you such a feeling?"
"No, there's another one." Kolobo shook his head.
"Who is it?" Camus was surprised.
Kolobo's expression suddenly turned serious.
"I can't say. I'll die if I say it. I'll die!"
With that, the thin Beyonder swiftly left Camus's office.
...
Upon returning to Hotel Orella, Lumian headed straight for the master bedroom.
In the subterranean suite, even during the scorching season, a refreshing coolness lingered in the air.
On the desk in the master bedroom, a neatly folded letter awaited Lumian.
Madam Magician's response... Lumian picked up the letter and began reading.
"Excellent. You have a good understanding of yourself.

"The Rose School of Thought and the Numinous Episcopate will be managed by dedicated personnel. No need for you to take unnecessary risks. Concentrate on dealing with Hisoka. If they request your help, you may cooperate.
"The Beyonder characteristics left behind by members of the Rose School of Thought, especially those of the Devil and Prisoner pathways, come with a certain level of troublesome corruption. It's advisable not to sell them or randomly seek out an Artisan to craft items. If you need to, you can sell them to me or let me find an Artisan. Keeping them in the Traveler's Bag is also fine. Compared to the Shadow Branch boxing gloves, Mr. Fool's seal, and the attention and influence of other items on you, they're as weak as an ordinary newborn baby."
Relieved by this response, Lumian took a breath and activated the black mark on his right shoulder, vanishing from the room.
After a while, he materialized atop a bell tower on Avenue du Boulevard in Trier.
Gazing at the luxurious Champs-Élysées in the distance and the already lit lamps, Lumian couldn't hold back any longer. He needed to carefully consider the information he had just obtained from Camus.
With the Berserk Sea, the Feynapotter Kingdom, and half of the Intis Republic between them, Lumian could devise a plan to hunt Hisoka without worrying about the enemy sensing malice and danger!
Perhaps only an Angel could sense over such a distance.
Though Lumian lacked specific information about his target or Hisoka's identity and had no concrete plan, caution was paramount when he had the ability to be cautious.
Relying on his Ascetic trait, he endured, putting aside thoughts of the corresponding matters. Only when far from Port Pylos and the Southern Continent did he carefully consider details, allowing his thoughts to run free.
After an indeterminate amount of time, Lumian vanished from the bell tower.
Clang! Clang! Clang!
The pendulum clock struck 7 p.m.
...
The next morning.
Upon entering the hall, Camus spotted Louis Berry, adorned in a golden straw hat, seated on a sofa in the reception area.
Why is he here again? Recalling Kolobo's warning, Camus frowned and approached with concern.
"What can I do for you this time?" he asked calmly, keeping his

emotions in check.
Lumian chuckled.
"I need some information, but it won't be from you. Find a reliable teammate who isn't privy to our discussion yesterday evening. Meet me at the Matani Import and Export Shop.
"I can offer 5,000 verl d'or for this."
A peculiar request... 5,000 verl d'or. How generous... *Is he trying to avoid a Devil's danger premonition?* Camus, an experienced official Beyonder, quickly made the connection.
He refrained from overthinking and pondered for a moment before responding, "Agreed."
Heading into the office area, Lumian rose and departed, making his way to the Matani Import and Export Shop nearby.
Soon, a man sat opposite Lumian, who was savoring his coffee.
The man, with dark hair and a relatively thin build, was a member of the patrol team who had accompanied them to the scene yesterday. Today, he wore dark-black sunglasses, giving him the appearance of a blind individual.
"I'm Kolobo. Camus mentioned a chance to earn 5,000 verl d'or," the patrol team member introduced himself in fluent Intisian.
Amused, Lumian observed Kolobo's demeanor. Taking out a pen and paper, he counted out 5,000 verl d'or notes and slid them over.
"Write down the Prisoner pathway Beyonder's name and details from the patrol team. Ensure I don't catch sight of it. Fold it into a square after writing."
Kolobo, almost as if blind, fumbled for the banknotes.
He bent down and counted, nearly burying his head under the table.
"Why aren't you looking at me?" Lumian asked with curiosity.
Trembling, Kolobo replied, "I fear I might truly go blind."
Are you able to see something you shouldn't? From the Monster pathway? Lumian pondered but refrained from probing further.
Kolobo turned around and swiftly wrote down the corresponding information on the table behind him, folding the paper and passing it to Lumian.
Without a second glance, Lumian promptly received the information and stowed it in his Traveler's Bag.
After settling the bill for his coffee, he headed to the washroom.
His figure vanished once more.

Chapter 645: "Gifts"

After Louis Berry left the coffee area, Kolobo breathed a sigh of relief. He removed his sunglasses, retrieved the 5,000 verl d'or, and counted it again.

His gut told him this deal would work out. That's the only reason he dared to risk coming to the Matani Import and Export Shop. Still, his whole body had been trembling with fear. He couldn't even keep his eyes open most of the time, and his hands were shaking so badly that he was surprised it was legible.

Trouble always waits until it's ready to explode, he thought, clutching his sunglasses.

He stood up and headed for the door.

Something was wrong. He could feel it. His body tensed with some kind of danger sense he couldn't explain.

His heart raced as he scanned the place professionally, trying to pinpoint the danger. Kolobo's footsteps changed--sometimes fast, sometimes slow. He'd zip off in one direction only to stop short a few paces later.

Kolobo took in the morning sun, the quiet shop that had just opened its doors, and the handful of customers scattered about. Not a single pair of eyes seemed fixed on him, and there was no one lurking in the shadows, observing his every move.

Yet, following his instincts, his feet carried him back to the coffee shop area. That's where he finally stopped, in front of the bathroom sign.

Two years as a Beyonder taught Kolobo the most important lesson: trust your gut. Without thinking, he yanked open the heavy wooden door and walked inside.

The Matani Import and Export Shop wasn't some back-alley dive. This restroom was big. Three urinals, three stalls, and gas lamps flickered on the clean tile.

Kolobo headed to the sink to splash cold water on his face. Maybe that would shake this weird danger feeling that was creeping all over him.

As he looked up, a face stared back at him in the mirror.

But it wasn't his.

The face was freakishly white. The guy looked late twenties, with light brown skin and eyes that flashed a dark, sickly green. He stared at Kolobo with dead, cold eyes.

Kolobo's brain short-circuited as recognition hit.

Twanaku TupiÃ¡n, the only Prisoner pathway Beyonder on their patrol team. The guy had become a Sequence 6 Zombie last year.

He was also the first guy to ever make Kolobo's skin crawl. If he

told anyone else, he gut told him he'd end up dead!
When Lumian asked Kolobo to spill the beans about the Prisoner pathway Beyonder on his team, something about it felt wrong. He'd almost bailed on the whole deal. He'd counted that huge 50,000 sum not out of distrust but because he needed time to think, to weigh the risk.
He decided to trust his gut, but he hadn't told Lumian about this feeling, this fear of TupiÃ¡n...
And now, here Twanaku TupiÃ¡n was, reflected in the mirror.
This is a Sequence 5 Wraith power. *When did he advance?* Kolobo could barely think over the growing horror. Suddenly, his body felt like it'd been dropped into an icy lake.
Twanaku Twanaku's face in the mirror vanished.
Kolobo could barely move. An icy coldness gripped him, the kind that chilled you to the bone.
It wasn't his own hands that were moving--they lifted without him wanting them to. A voice drifted through his ears, flat and emotionless.
"Looks like my cover is blown. You were actually asked to provide my information.
"I'll get out of Port Pylos, but I'm going to leave two gifts for Lumian Lee."
What did that even mean? What kind of gift? And who the heck was Lumian Lee? Kolobo's thoughts were a jumbled mess. His own hands were tightening around his neck.
Then, with a sickening jolt, he realized what "gift" the voice was talking about.
Twanaku TupiÃ¡n was going to kill him and leave a gift--his dead body!
But he said two gifts. *What was the other one?*
...
In the four-story beige building of the patrol team.
Camus sipped his Highlander coffee and read the West Balam Telegraph, contemplating the deal between Kolobo and Louis Berry. If successful, as an intermediary, he would receive 20% of the amount.
Knock, knock, knock. A gentle rap echoed on Camus's office door.
"Please come in." Though not particularly young, Camus had ample experience, leading one of the patrol team's operations teams. If there were a vacancy for the vice-captain position, his only competition would be Twanaku TupiÃ¡n of the Prisoner pathway.
The Southern Continent was a chaotic place, especially in an area torn between multiple factions. Whether dealing with the bloodthirsty Rose School of Thought, the ominous Numinous

Episcopate, ambitious adventurers, spies from various countries, or missionaries, danger lurked at every corner. Some would take the initiative to assassinate patrol team members, while others would rebel and escape. Meticulous planning was not uncommon, and even the patrol team members found themselves as targets. Consequently, the patrol team faced casualties every year, leading to a constant need for new recruits.

Encountering more attacks had its advantages. Victorious confrontations often yielded valuable items and Beyonder-related ingredients. Many of the patrol team's advancement formulas and potions were acquired in such situations, creating a noteworthy trend.

Compared to cities of similar size in the Northern Continent, Port Pylos had an even greater number of official Beyonders, especially Mid-Sequence Beyonders. However, they lacked higher levels of power or corresponding Sealed Artifacts.

Camus found himself in a tight spot financially due to his rapid advancement outpacing his cousins.

Arriving in Matani State and Port Pylos as a Sequence 9 Arbiter, he had swiftly climbed to a Sequence 7 Justiciar in just five years. His goal was to advance to Sequence 6 and become a Judge, and he had recently been gathering the funds to purchase the necessary materials. If the opportunity to become a vice-captain arose, the patrol team would certainly contribute resources to aid his advancement.

Spoils of war weren't always suitable for him; sometimes, he needed to trade with teammates or sell them to the patrol team for money. He patiently waited for the potion formulas and Beyonder ingredients corresponding to his pathway to appear.

The patrol team, being relatively new, hadn't accumulated substantial reserves. Camus needed to find a way to purchase practical mystical items, regularly replenish charms, potions, and other essentials to stay prepared against assassinations and conflicts.

In such a situation, money was naturally scarce.

Chaos was a path to hell but also a ladder to the top!

Pugilist Sow entered.

With his brown braids gently swaying, Sow, clad in a sky-blue shirt and beige pants, approached Camus with one hand in his pocket, smiling as he asked, "Have you seen Kolobo? I need to discuss something with him."

Camus had already prepared a reason.

"He went to the Import and Export Shop to buy coffee beans."

Sow tersely acknowledged, "Then I'll wait for him to return."

"What's up?" Camus asked casually.
Sow took two steps forward and smiled.
"There's an investigation we would like to involve him in. Maybe he can uncover clues that others can't."
"You bastards, aren't you concerned about Kolobo getting hurt?" Camus replied with amusement, lifting his coffee and taking a sip.
At that moment, Sow withdrew his right hand from his trouser pocket, holding a poker card flickering with a metallic gleam between his thumb and index finger.
The card portrayed a grayish-white clown.
With a swift motion, Sow hurled the poker card at Camus's head.
...
In the men's washroom of the Matani Import and Export Shop.
Kolobo finally caught his reflection in the mirror.
His skin had turned a sickly green, and his hands were locked around his own neck, the pressure making his bones crack. Twanaku Tupián stared back at him from his bright blue eyes.
Kolobo tried to scream, but nothing came out. He wanted to run, but his legs wouldn't move.
It was like his body wasn't his anymore—it was killing him.
Ugh... A choked sound finally escaped Kolobo's throat, too quiet for anyone to hear.
Fear and despair tightened around his heart.
Then, Kolobo's fingers slipped.
A figure emerged from the shadows by the bathroom vents.
Lumian—black hair, green eyes, all dressed in black and white with a golden straw hat.
A flicker of surprise crossed his face, then understanding. He held a black bone flute to his lips.
A hum resounded, accompanied by a melancholic tune echoing from the dark red holes.
Symphony of Hatred!
Why did I only sense malice and danger now... Just as this thought crossed Twanaku's mind, Twanaku's murderous intent exploded, fueled by the haunting melody.
Silently, a figure peeled away from Kolobo's body. It was Twanaku Tupián, his light brown skin gone deathly pale.
Blood vessels bulged in his yellow eyes, threatening to burst.
The Symphony of Hatred tore into Kolobo, already weak with fear.
His heart almost stopped. He crumpled to the floor, barely alive.
Lumian stopped the melody. Holding the black bone flute, he slid back into the shadows and under the vent.
A moment later, he reappeared behind Twanaku Tupián, who was practically vibrating with murderous intent. Lumian lifted the

flute, its blood-colored holes gleaming ominously, and took a breath.
Finally, you're here!

Chapter 646: Indoor Fight

Twanaku Tupián's ears rang, his eyes stinging with blood. His mind burned, his thoughts scattering like sparks. For an agonizing moment, he couldn't process his situation, couldn't even think about the enemy closing in.

Blood, smelling strangely metallic, trickled from his eyes and nose. His pale skin darkened ominously.

"Ha!"

Lumian spat a blast of pale-yellow light, hitting the suspected Hisoka from barely two meters away.

Twanaku's eyes slammed shut, and he collapsed. Before he hit the ground, Lumian's Symphony of Hatred, a black bone flute, jabbed towards his neck.

Instantly, the tiled bathroom floor dissolved into a vast, muddy expanse of darkness. Arms burst upward.

Some were stripped of skin, all raw muscle and glistening tendon. Others twisted and ghostly, pale and transparent. Some bore bulging eyes that spun madly, others sprouted thick green growths...

The grotesque limbs tore at Lumian and Twanaku, clawing and dragging.

This was Twanaku's spell, a death-type enchantment once called Vengeful Wraith's Entanglement, meant to summon an undead horde to paralyze his targets.

But as a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Devil pathway, his power twisted the spell into something new—the Fallen Abyss!

He could alter a space in advance, allowing undead or fallen creatures to lurk beneath the surface. Anyone unfortunate enough to step inside would be grabbed by unseen arms and dragged into the muddy, pitch-black depths. The Abyss would slow and weaken its victims, the icy touch of the undead stealing their strength with agonizing speed. If they were pulled all the way under, they'd be corrupted and lost.

Twanaku had cast this spell in the bathroom before attacking Kolobo. He hadn't wanted any nosy employees or customers to stumble on the scene, but it turned out to be a lucky break. That's why he'd appeared in the mirror instead of right inside Kolobo's eyes.

Lumian's attack with the Symphony of Hatred came to an abrupt halt.

Countless arms wrapped around his ankles, calves, hips, and torso. A wave of icy stiffness washed over him, his movements turning sluggish.

It was the same for Twanaku. With the Wraith and Desire Apostle unconscious, the Fallen Abyss slipped from his control, leaving him vulnerable. His limp body was seized by the strange arms and dragged to the ground.
Nearby, Kolobo, badly injured and out for the count, was pulled into the muddy, pitch-black depths of the illusory Abyss.
A burst of crimson flames exploded from Lumian's body, surrounding him like a blazing cloak.
The flames roared, scorching most of the arms into retreat. Still, some remained unaffected, their grip relentless. A creeping coldness numbed Lumian's body, but he regained a sliver of his former agility.
Before, he could have simply lunged forward, thrusting the black bone flute towards his enemy's neck. But now, the target—the one he believed was Hisoka—was about to vanish into the ground.
Thud!
Twanaku slammed into the ground, the impact jarring him awake. The Spell of Harrumph's grip faded, and he finally regained his senses.
His toughest moment, that relentless surge of desire, was behind him.
Lumian lowered his head, a single scornful sound escaping him.
"Hmph!"
Twin beams of white light shot out while Lumian retracted his hands, fingers slipping back into his Traveler's Bag.
The beams missed their mark, but horrifying, bloody arms sprouted from the ground, a gruesome forest that blocked Twanaku from their path.
With a flash of awareness, Twanaku seized control of the Fallen Abyss spell, shielding himself and attacking his enemy.
The arms hit by the Spell of Harrumph softened, sinking back into the pitch-black mud as if drained.
Twanaku took his chance. His body twisted, morphing into a dark, oozing malevolence, a shape born from the darkest shadows of his heart.
Silently, Twanaku transformed into an illusory, viscous, and foul black liquid, merging with the muddy Abyss and vanishing.
The evil arms, unfazed by the flames, clung to Lumian, limiting his movement.
His hands flew to his Traveler's Bag, pulling out a suit of gleaming silver armor.
He set the armor beside him, sinking it firmly into the pitch-black mud.
Pride Armor!

Evil, writhing arms erupted from the illusory Abyss—and the corresponding spirit world. Guided by the spell, they lunged for the Pride Armor, seizing its ankles, legs, torso, and back.
The Pride Armor struck back, a broadsword of pure light flashing in its hand. Blinding, holy light flooded the washroom.
The shadowy arms recoiled with hisses of black smoke, retreating into the depths.
The pitch-black mud dissolved, revealing the bathroom's stone tiles.
Kolobo, who'd been on the brink of sinking into the Abyss, lay unconscious on the floor.
Just meters away, near the washroom door, a figure of viscous black liquid prepared to flee.
Now free, Twanaku came to a swift decision.
He wouldn't waste time trying to possess Lumian Lee. Instead, he'd abandon the Matani Import and Export Shop—and Port Pylos!
It was a trap. He had to escape before it closed around him. Staying to fight back was foolish—he couldn't risk lingering just to satisfy his rage and murderous desire.
That would be far too dangerous!
Twanaku was glad he'd chosen to give Lumian Lee those two "gifts". He'd even divided his favorite mystical items to do it. The patrol team should be in chaos by now, focused on a false target.
The distraction would give him his chance to escape.
Before, Twanaku hadn't been focused on killing Camus. His priority was taking out Kolobo and escaping. If everything went smoothly, there shouldn't be problems for either side. Any chaos caused by Camus's death would be a bonus—
distracting the enemy by having the other passing off as the real deal.
He'd sent that extra "gift" as a precaution, not some bloodthirsty urge!
...
In Camus's office, nestled inside the patrol team's beige four-story building, a poker card shimmered with metallic light as it hurtled towards him. Coffee was the last thing on his mind. He dove behind his desk with a surge of adrenaline, planning to send the table flying back at Sow before blasting him with Psychic Piercing.
The joker-faced card soared over Camus's head, missing its target.
But then, as if it had a mind of its own, the card swerved and plunged down, aiming for Camus's back.
It seemed to melt right into him, vanishing in a flash.
Sow's grin stretched wider. He strode to the desk, yanking the

broadsword from his back.
...
Inside the men's bathroom of the Matani Import and Export Shop.
A figure made of thick, black liquid slipped through the crack under the door then strangely reformed in its original spot.
Bottle of Fiction!
The moment Lumian harbored malice and took out the Symphony of Hatred from the Traveler's Bag, Lumian had used this bathroom vent as a base, using the Bottle of Fiction to set one condition: only females could enter or exit!
That way, innocent customers wouldn't stumble into the dangerous Beyonder battle. And Hisoka couldn't escape without destroying the Bottle of Fiction first!
The black, liquid figure spread toward the vent, dodging the two white beams from Lumian.
Twanaku was done with dodging. His body swelled and warped, transforming into a monstrous giant almost three meters tall.
The monster's skin turned a dull, dark shade, and a pair of curved goat horns marked with strange patterns sprouted from his head. Colossal bat wings wreathed in blue and crimson flames lashed out, releasing a stinging, sulfurous stench.
Devil Transformation!
This was the signature power of a Sequence 6 Devil from the Prisoner pathway—a boost to strength, speed, defense... everything.
Lumian knew his target, the one he thought was Hisoka, was on high alert, braced to dodge his Spell of Harrumph. He stopped using it.
He decided against the Symphony of Hatred too. The situation was different.
Before, his enemy had been fueled by bloodlust in his murder attempt on Kolobo, a perfect trigger. Now, there was only a cold, emotionless focus.
With no guarantee that the Symphony of Hatred would work
—or that it wouldn't backfire—Lumian wasn't taking that chance.
Instead, a crimson spear sparked into existence. From a few meters away, he hurled it at the suspected Hisoka.
The second the spear left his hand, Lumian vanished.
He couldn't stay put. Possession by the Wraith, a mind-shattering psychic blast from a Desire Apostle, some twisted desire spell—any of those were a risk!

Chapter 647: "Inexplicable Action"

In the face of the flaming spear, Twanaku's eyes, now crimson from the Devil Transformation, reflected dancing and burning crimson flames.

He remained unfazed. Instead, he conjured an aberration--a broadsword made of crimson magma and pale-blue flames.

Swiftly turning, Twanaku exposed his back to the flaming spear. With the magma broadsword in hand, he slashed at the foe who had seemingly teleported behind him, launching an attack.

The broadsword, adorned with crimson magma and pale-blue flames, sliced through the air but missed Lumian. It left only an exaggerated mark on the wall behind, a testament to its destructive force.

Had it not been for the Bottle of Fiction's protection, the bathroom wall would have been split in half. Even so, the bottle visibly trembled, bearing some damage.

The nearly white flaming spear also struck Twanaku's back, piercing a little before being halted by the elastic dark skin and sturdy flesh. It failed to penetrate the Devil's body, leaving only blackened traces from the resulting inferno.

Devils, armored in thick and tough natural protection, were resistant to flames, poison, and curses to a certain extent. Twanaku, in his Zombie state, possessed a steel-like body that could withstand bullets and cannonballs. Lumian's flaming spear and fireball attacks, as well as the Fire Ravens' onslaught, posed little threat. Standing still, Twanaku could endure repeated attacks without suffering severe injuries.

Additionally, his ability to transform into a Wraith allowed him to evade explosions effortlessly.

"Hisoka" Twanaku believed that, without the support of the Tarot Club, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, and powerful demigods, he could have tortured Lumian to death. Even with teleportation, spells rendering him temporarily unconscious, and mystical items, most of Lumian's attacks were ineffective against Wraiths and Desire Apostle Beyonders. The Psychic Shock and Desire Detonation further restrained him, leaving him vulnerable to the assaults of Wraiths and undead creatures.

Having missed his strike, Twanaku noticed Lumian's figure reappear in midair.

As anticipated, Lumian had chosen to teleport behind and launch an attack. However, there was a notable change compared to previous encounters.

Hovering near the ceiling and the vent, Lumian opened his mouth

and emitted a harrumph.
The moment a pale-yellow light shot out, Hisoka Twanaku's figure faded and vanished.
In Lumian's pupils, a devilish figure materialized--dark skin, long goat horns, bat wings on its back, and no longer wielding the Sword of Lava.
Swiftly, Twanaku transformed into a Wraith, leaping into Lumian's eyes, deftly dodging the Spell of Harrumph's attack.
Devil Transformation didn't impede his Wraith abilities!
Lumian's face paled, a dark-green hue tinting his features. His hands involuntarily rose, reaching for his neck, and his body plummeted to the ground.
Prepared for such a situation, Lumian didn't resist. While he could still struggle, he didn't halt his hands or resist the Wraith's control. Instead, he sank his consciousness into his right hand.
The frenzied, bloody aura of superiority dissipated slightly, causing Twanaku to instinctively tremble.
He subconsciously detached from Lumian's body and leaped onto the sink.
Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder, vanishing before crashing to the ground.
This time, he appeared behind the motionless silver-white full-body armor.
Behind!
The Pride Armor spun around abruptly, raising the broadsword of light and slashing at Lumian in the not-too-small bathroom.
Lumian employed Spirit World Traversal once more, vanishing from the silver armor's path.
Within the mirror, "Hisoka" Twanaku was somewhat bewildered.
Why did Lumian Lee provoke his Sealed Artifact and engage in combat with it?
Am I not his enemy target?
The negative effects of a Sealed Artifact?
Though he didn't understand what was going on, Twanaku sensed danger instinctively.
His Danger Premonition, along with a possible insight from Emperor Roselle--"If something shows signs of abnormality, there must be an abnormal factor hidden. Such factors often signify danger."
Without hesitation, Twanaku left the sink and leaped to the bathroom door in his colossal Devil form.
Conjuring a dozen or so light-blue Sulfur Fireballs, he directed them at the wooden door in unison.
Twanaku, who had shaken the Bottle of Fiction with his sword,

knew that the current seal could be broken by brute force. There was no need to find the true exit or kill the enemy who had constructed the seal.
For this reason, he chose to forgo teaming up with the full-body armor to assail Lumian.
He reckoned that any further delay, even if Lumian Lee were to fall on the spot, would lead to him being surrounded, facing a lethal blow with no chance of escaping alive.
In such a scenario, killing Lumian Lee would render the effort meaningless!
Certainly, Twanaku wasn't about to let Lumian off easily. Following the Sulfur Fireball assault, he clenched his fists and spoke a word in Devil language filled with depravity and filth.
"Slow!"
This was a manifestation of the Language of Foulness, capable of stiffening and even halting the movements of targets within a seven- to eight-meter radius for approximately two seconds.
Considering the bathroom's size, this radius covered the entire area.
Lumian's form reappeared.
Once more, he teleported behind the Pride Armor, conjuring a crimson fireball almost white in his hand.
Influenced by the Language of Foulness, both Lumian and the Pride Armor moved sluggishly. One "slowly" launched a fireball, while the other struggled to turn around, as if its joints had rusted.
Rumble!
The Sulfur Fireballs erupted against the bathroom door.
A translucent, illusory membrane materialized on the bathroom's side. Like glass, it shattered inch by inch, leaving crisscrossing marks that teetered on the brink of collapse.
The wooden door appeared charred and pieced together, reminiscent of a child's broken toy hastily glued back together.
Observing this, "Hisoka" Twanaku grasped that another strike could completely shatter the seal.
This time, he gathered seven to eight light-blue Sulfur Fireballs.
On the opposite end, Lumian's fireball finally collided with the Pride Armor's back, assisted by the explosive waves.
Amidst the rumbling and clanging, the silver armor stiffened.
Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder once more and teleported away from his current location.
Almost simultaneously, the Pride Armor overcame the effects of Slow with abnormal swiftness, swiftly turning around.
However, it still couldn't lock onto its target.
Twanaku felt a surge of amusement bubbling within him but

maintained an unusual vigilance. His only wish was that the relentless bombardment would shatter the seal completely, granting him an avenue for escape.
In the next moment, the Sulfur Fireballs collided with the wooden door at the bathroom entrance. Twanaku witnessed the silver-white full-body armor squat down, driving the broadsword of light into the ground.
Wh— Twanaku's pupils dilated as he instinctively readied himself to transform into a Wraith.
Yet, he held back, exercising restraint. Aware of the potential consequences within the Warrior pathway, he understood the risk of subjecting himself to even greater harm.
Rumble!
Simultaneously with the explosion of the Sulfur Fireballs, the Sword of Dawn, embedded in the crevice in the stone tiles by the Pride Armor, disintegrated into fragments of light. Densely packed, they formed a flickering, violent, and sharp hurricane that swept in all directions, filled with the intent to annihilate everything.
Hurricane of Light!
Since it couldn't lock onto the backstabber, it opted for a wide-ranging assault!
The sharp and terrifying storm of light enveloped Twanaku and Kolobo on the ground. Lumian materialized in front of the latter, crouched down, shielding vital points. He faced the formidable hurricane head-on.
The washroom bore the brunt of the assault. The urinal was wrecked, and the cubicles silently collapsed, shedding a layer of bricks.
As a depraved creature, Twanaku had nowhere to hide. All he could do was endure the damage, his eyes flickering with a sharp light.
In the radiant blades' storm, Lumian's figure cracked inch by inch, shattering into numerous mirror fragments.
Mirror Substitution!
With his obstruction, Kolobo avoided fatal injuries but couldn't escape multiple bleeding wounds.
...
In Camus's office, within the beige four-story building housing the patrol team.
Crouched behind a table, Camus's face turned pale, tinged with a dark-green hue. It was as if a grayish-white clown laughed exaggeratedly in his eyes.
Camus strained to ignite bolts of lightning in his eyes, piercing Sow's mind. His betraying teammate grimaced in pain, causing his broadsword to lose strength and direction, crashing into the desk

and failing to hit Camus.
In that critical moment, Camus drew a silver revolver from his right hand, aiming it not at Sow but at himself.
Across the street, in a room facing Camus's office,
Jenna, holding a telescope, huddled by the curtain, closely monitored Camus's condition.
Seeing the other party under attack and struggling, she swiftly grabbed the loudspeaker she had prepared and brought it to her mouth.
"Camus has been attacked!
"Camus has been attacked by the Rose School of Thought!
"Camus is being attacked in his office!"
The loudspeaker's sound reverberated through every room of the patrol team.

Chapter 648: Teamwork

On the top floor of the beige building belonging to the patrol team, a middle-aged man in a thin black suit heard Jenna's voice.

Without bothering to trace the source of the shout, he stood up abruptly and retrieved a white human skull, seemingly carved from crystal, from his hidden pocket.

The man, a mix of Intis and West Balam lineage, held the crystal skull and recited a mysterious language with a strong sense of death.

In the next moment, a decaying palm extended from the void in front of him. Its joints were thick, and its skin was bleeding, revealing signs of decay.

The palm belonged to a corpse that looked vaguely human but, upon closer inspection, resembled a monster.

Over 1.8 meters tall, its face concealed by a rusty bronze mask, and its torso composed of corpses from various species, including lions, tigers, black wolves, baboons, giant serpents, vultures, and humans themselves--all in a severe state of rot.

The corpse's bronze mask flickered with dark-red lights in its eyes as it took a step forward, arriving in Camus's office.

Faced with Camus, who had a revolver in his right hand, staggering toward his forehead, the monstrous corpse removed its bronze mask.

Underneath the mask, there was no nose, flesh, or bones. Only two dark-red balls of light and a mouth that occupied four-fifths of the head.

The mouth opened wide, revealing a pitch-black interior.

A terrifying suction force emanated from the mouth, affecting Camus's spirit but having no effect on the documents, newspapers, and other items on the desk. It only caused Camus's spirit to surface, as if pulled by an invisible force, about to be plunged into hell.

As Camus's Spirit Body materialized, the grayish-white clown seeped out of his flesh, revealing its complete form--a magnified, illusory poker card.

The poker card had no body of its own and was swiftly drawn out by the pitch-black mouth beneath the bronze mask. Camus's Spirit Body struggled.

Smack!

The poker card materialized and fell to the ground, emitting the sound of a heavy object colliding with solid bricks, but there was no metallic sound.

...

In the Matani Import and Export Shop, the male bathroom lay in ruins. The door and the wall facing the corridor crumbled into fragments, scattering for several meters, as if a storm had passed through.
The Bottle of Fiction had lost its effect.
Amidst the residual fragments of light and the lingering sulfur smell, Twanaku rolled out in his Devil form.
His pitch-black skin bore hideous wounds, and his flesh seemed to evaporate. Half of the two curved goat horns on his head were gone, and viscous black liquid flowed from the cracks.
The bat-like wings on his back were tattered and drooping.
With Twanaku's formidable physical strength, the Hurricane of Light from the Pride Armor shouldn't have caused such tragic and severe damage, but he was a Devil.
The Hurricane of Light possessed the unique ability to destroy evil creatures and undead beings.
It was like Twanaku undergoing purification while being sliced by a fragmentary blade. What made it more potent was their collaboration. Purification weakened defense and inflicted harm on the evil creature's spirit and flesh, while the fragmentary blade utilized purification to weaken defense and cut through flesh. The more wounds and the deeper they were, the better the purification effect.
Had Twanaku not resisted in his Devil form and instead transformed into a Wraith, he might have faced severe injury, teetering on the brink of death, or even elimination.
The Hurricane of Light could vanquish Wraiths and injure evil spirits.
Despite being severely injured, Twanaku, still capable of combat, calmly suppressed his tyrannical and bloodthirsty emotions. Realizing he had escaped the seal, he prepared to transform into a Wraith and escape through the surrounding mirrors.
Just as he made this decision, a sudden sense of Danger Premonition struck him.
The malice came from behind, and in the shadows outside the bathroom, Franca, dressed in an Assassin suit, emerged, raising her left hand.
On her left thumb, she wore an iron-colored ring with a thick band and a surface covered in small spikes--Ring of Punishment!
Franca's lake-blue eyes flickered with lightning, moving many times faster than the fastest bullets, shooting out silently with Psychic Piercing!
Hidden Blade... Why do I only sense her malice now... The severely injured Twanaku couldn't dodge in time and suddenly heard an

illusory shattering sound.
The shattering sound echoed from Twanaku's Spirit Body, and intense pain flooded his mind, compelling him to raise his hands to cover his head.
Seizing the opportunity, Franca swiftly took out a mirror and reflected Twanaku in his Devil form.
Black flames ignited in her left palm as she smeared it across the mirror's surface--
Demoness's curse!
Black flames erupted from Twanaku's body, but nearly two-thirds were suppressed by his flesh and blood, leaving only a portion of the colossal Devil's Spirit Body to be incinerated.
Being a Devil, immune to curses to a certain extent, helped Twanaku endure the Demoness's curse better, given his already ravaged state from the Hurricane of Light.
Finally free from the influence of Psychic Piercing, Twanaku, with his Spirit Body engulfed in black flames, transformed into a pitch-black, viscous liquid.
These liquids seemed to originate from the darkest corners of the human heart, representing the most sinister and shadowy desires and emotions.
Twanaku abandoned Wraith Form, choosing Desire Apostle's Desire Incarnation because Demoness's black flames targeted the Spirit Body more.
Before the pitch-black viscous liquid could fully elongate into a human figure, he fled into the nearby darkness, sensing a strong Danger Premonition in his heart.
At the corridor's entrance, Anthony Reid, donned in military-green attire, appeared in a blind spot.
His eyes took on a faint golden hue, transforming into vertical pupils—Psychological Invisibility!
Frenzy!
Twanaku's mind buzzed, instantly breaking free from his Desire Incarnation state. Bloodshot eyes and livor mortis appeared on his body, emitting sulfurous blood.
He entered a frenzied state. Already grievously injured and subjected to Psychic Piercing and the Demoness's curse, he was on the verge of losing control.
Rumble!
Light-blue sulfur fireballs pelted the surroundings, propelled by Twanaku's wild instincts.
Franca's form quickly shattered into mirror fragments, while Anthony's body sprouted grayish-white dragon scales. He leaped toward the wall for cover.

Rumble!
Using up Franca's Mirror Substitution, Lumian teleported behind the frenzied Twanaku.
Having already unleashed the accumulated spirituality and strength within him, Lumian's spirituality surged, no longer drained.
Enduring the scorching sulfur flames and the blast's impact, Lumian focused on the oblivious, frenzied Twanaku. He harrumphed.
Two beams of white light shot from his nose, hitting what appeared to be Hisoka.
Twanaku collapsed, and the signs of madness began to fade.
Lumian didn't allow him to reach the ground. Extending his right hand, he grabbed Twanaku by the shoulder and teleported him into the spirit world!
In seconds, Lumian materialized at the edge of the primitive forest near Port Pylos.
Even during this process, he let out a harrumph. The pale-yellow light emitted from his mouth knocked Twanaku out again, preventing him from regaining consciousness.
At that moment, a woman stood at the edge of the primitive forest. It was Hela, dressed like a black widow but not as distant as before.
Observing Twanaku, no longer in his colossal Devil state but emitting a sulfuric scent, with dark patterns on his skin, Hela nodded at Lumian and said, "It should be Hisoka."
Every time Hisoka participated in the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, he only disguised himself superficially. If Hisoka's true identity was targeted, Hela, who was responsible for providing the gathering venue and entrance method, could still recognize him.
"Ha!" Lumian chuckled and added a new Spell of Harrumph to Hisoka.
Hela seized his arm and chanted an incantation.
The two of them, along with Hisoka, vanished like pencil drawings erased by an eraser.
In the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight.
As Lumian emerged from his concealed state, he harrumphed.
Two beams of white light descended, and Hisoka remained unconscious.
Hela's tone chilled as she remarked, "I'll let you enter the same dream."
"Thank you." Lumian released Hisoka, reclining against a broken

stone pillar.
Moments later, his thoughts blurred until he heard Hela's voice.
"It's done."
Lumian snapped back, gazing into the interrogation room where Hisoka sat opposite.
This member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Twanaku Tupián, bore light-brown skin, a blend of Northern and Southern Continent descent. His eyes gleamed flaxen, his hair dark. While not unattractive, his demeanor exuded indifference to life.
At the sight, Lumian's lips curved into a smile.
He had sought Hela's assistance primarily to craft an environment where he could safely unveil his plans after capturing Hisoka alive. Otherwise, restraining Hisoka's resistance would have posed a significant challenge. Communicating with him would have been impossible if he remained unconscious until his demise. Destroying Hisoka's frontal lobe would strip away frustration, pain, and resentment, making it difficult to fulfill the requirements of the Reaper ritual.
Upon spotting Lumian, Hisoka suddenly struggled, but an invisible force held him back, preventing his transformation into a Wraith.
This was a dream controlled by Hela.
Hisoka calmed down and gazed at Lumian, posing the greatest question on his mind, "How did you manage to evade my Danger Premonition?"
Lumian's smile deepened. He looked down at Hisoka and said casually, "No need for a Demon Hunter's assistance. A sufficient distance and a Hypnotist would do the trick."

Sufficient distance and a Hypnotist... Hisoka repeated Lumian's words as if he had realized something.
Lumian stood in front of him, looking down, and questioned, "Do you think that, apart from Demon Hunters and higher-level Beyonders of the corresponding pathway, Devils mainly get killed based on chance encounters in battles?"
Hisoka regarded Lumian with indifference and remained silent.
Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down, crossing his right foot over his left knee. Casually, he said, "I've read a mysticism book about Devils. It's filled with numerous cases of hunting Devils.
"It's clear that Beyonders of most pathways rely on chance encounters to kill specific Devils. That's what I believed back then. However, when I revisited the detailed description of Devil abilities, I found a contradiction.
"This is how the mysticism book describes your Danger Premonition:
"Danger Premonition, also known as Malicious Perception--if an enemy can soon cause lethal harm to a Devil and takes clear action to do so, a Devil can sense the danger in advance and grasp the source. They can target it, kill it, take revenge, or escape, but it's impossible to know the exact details of the plan. Different Devils have different intuition ranges--from a few minutes to a day, from a few kilometers to as wide as a city."
"What's the contradiction between this and a battle encounter?" Hisoka asked, sitting upright, cold and curious.
"According to this description, Devils can indeed sense a battle encounter," Lumian said with a smile. "For example, even though I only intended to have a cup of coffee today and suddenly encountered a Devil, and had no choice but to kill him. For that Devil, it's literal. He should have sensed that my coffee-drinking at the café would pose a fatal danger to him in advance and that it would happen, but that's not the case in reality."
Observing Hisoka's thoughtful expression, Lumian clasped his hands together.
"This means that a Devil's Danger Premonition doesn't stem from fate. If it were a powerful Beyonder of the Monster pathway, there's a high chance they would suddenly feel that coffee isn't suitable today and avoid danger. But you can't.
"Since a Devil's Danger Premonition doesn't stem from precognition of fate, where does it stem from?
"Once, a high-ranking Demon enlightened me about the concept of the Abyss. According to its perspective, the Abyss holds two

dimensions. The first is physical, with an entrance hidden somewhere in the real world. The second is in the mind, with an entrance nestled deep within everyone's hearts.
"Considering this insight, I believe we need to tweak the foundation of a Devil's Danger Premonition.
"It kicks in only when an adversary has a well-defined plan capable of inflicting fatal harm on a Devil soon. That's when the Devil can sense it beforehand.
"Got it? A more distinct thought process or intent."
Lumian adopted the cadence of Madam Magician to taunt Hisoka, weaving the narrative of his conspiracy.
"In the beginning, I probed bit by bit and investigated step by step. When I stumbled upon crucial information, I purposely skirted around it, leaving me in the dark about who I was dealing with and without a rough plan to handle the target.
"In simpler terms, I didn't have clear thoughts or intentions, and there was no effective plan to cause lethal harm to you anytime soon. Everything was vague, chaotic, and uncommitted, filled with variation and accidents, ensuring you couldn't naturally sense danger.
"However, your position alerted you when I delved into the serial murder from four years ago. Since then, you've been using a Wraith's ability and the patrol team members under your control to keep a vigilant eye on this matter, right?"
Hisoka listened coldly, showing no intention of responding.
Lumian smiled and continued, "After figuring out that you were hiding in the patrol team as a Zombie Sequence Beyonder, I resisted my urges and tried my best not to dwell on such matters. When I returned to the hotel, I immediately teleported to Trier.
"At this distance, you won't be able to sense that I'm formulating a plan and putting it into practice.
"After coming up with a preliminary plan, I went to Hidden Blade and my two other companions to discuss a detailed plan. It was just past 7 p.m. Trier time.
"The next move involved assigning tasks. Each of us had a role to play. We underwent a Hypnotist's Hypnotism, erasing our true purpose from memory. Only when a Devil like you emerged would we recall the specific details.
"My mission was to use teleportation, making it seem like I left, only to return stealthily using shadow concealment. I trailed the patrol team member I interacted with, believing that I was checking if there was anything problematic with him.
"Hidden Blade's mission was to tail me, providing necessary vigilance and support. If I activated the Bottle of Fiction ability,

she'd preemptively don the Ring of Punishment and lie in wait outside. The reason for her ambush eluded her until she laid eyes on you. With her combat prowess and intelligence, she instinctively knew what steps to take. No need for me to give detailed instructions.
"The Hypnotist's mission involved using Psychological Invisibility to wander the vicinity, just aimlessly wandering.
"As for the other Demoness, her duty was to monitor the patrol team and promptly report any issues to the authorities. Before your arrival, she too was unaware of the real reason behind her actions. She simply thought we had plans involving the patrol team.
"Before the Hypnotism wore off, none of us had intentions of confronting you. Our individual actions couldn't pose lethal harm to you, ensuring you couldn't foresee it.
"This was a premeditated encounter, a clash pitting you against multiple adversaries."
With that final sentence, Lumian suddenly heard an illusory shattering sound.
He sensed that his Conspirer potion had been fully digested.
He also felt Hisoka's seemingly cold expression, vexation, and regret growing, gnawing at his heart.
Lumian's smile widened. He stood up, leaned forward, and inched his head in front of Hisoka. He looked into Hisoka's bloodshot flaxen-colored eyes and said, "Your biggest mistake was not leaving Port Pylos ahead of time and sticking with the patrol team.
"Why are you so certain I won't track you down?"
"How do you know I enjoy Fermo coffee without sugar?" Hisoka inquired instead of answering.
Sensing his intense anger and killing intent, Lumian straightened up and replied with a smile, "My sister always says that wherever you go, you leave a trace, and I have an expert at finding traces with me.
"Heh heh, Emperor Roselle must have said something similar. You must know what it means."
Hisoka's hands tightened on the chair's armrests as he asked again, "Why were you so sure I'll kill Kolobo?"
Lumian replied with a sense of satisfaction, "I wasn't certain.
"Didn't I mention I had a Demoness companion monitoring the patrol team?
"Hidden Blade and I believed that if you ultimately choose to escape, you will definitely do something to vent your murderous desires. Otherwise, something might happen to you, considering your Devil and Prisoner pathways. And since you want to kill

someone, it's either the patrol team member who traded with me or Camus who gave me the information. It's either at the Matani Shop or in the patrol team."
At this juncture, Lumian guessed with a smile, "You took the gamble of staying in Port Pylos and the patrol team because you wanted to seize an opportunity to kill me? Under the watchful eyes of the Tarot Club and Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, finding a chance to eliminate a promising young man like me and escape unscathed can satisfy your twisted mind to the fullest extent?"
Hisoka subconsciously licked his lips.
"I initially planned to bide my time, waiting for your patience to wear thin and an opportune moment to present itself. But it seems you didn't seek the assistance of the demigods; you only reached out to Hela.
"I should have struck last night."
Hisoka didn't conceal his frustration.
Lumian didn't immediately address the topic. After a few moments of contemplation, he said,
"Waiting for an opportunity... You're quite confident in concealing your identity. Unafraid of normal investigations,
"Is it because the higher-ups of the patrol team allowed a Sequence 6 of the Prisoner pathway to join?"
Hisoka sealed his lips, responding with silence.
"Seems there's a significant secret lurking here." Lumian suddenly sensed a conspiracy. "Is the opportunity you're waiting for connected to this secret?"
Hisoka maintained silence, his eyes transformed, now bloodthirsty and filled with a desire to kill.
"Not willing to share?" Lumian chuckled. "No problem. Let's discuss something else first."
He bent down again, looking at Hisoka.
"In this operation, I sought only Hela. Firstly, to guard against the Nois family Demons who had made contact with you. Secondly, to create an environment for a quiet conversation with you."
At the mention of the Nois family's Demons, Hisoka's gaze subtly shifted.
"How do you know?"
Lumian didn't reply. The corners of his mouth curled up even more.
"I chose Hela because I wanted to capture you alive, relying on my own strength and that of my companions.
"Each of us is weaker than you, and each of us is someone you think you can easily kill. However, as a team, through teamwork,

we've put you in a tight spot. You'll descend into hell."
Hisoka shattered the chair's armrest, but he couldn't attack Lumian.
Observing his bloodshot eyes, Lumian retrieved a golden straw hat from his Traveler's Bag, pressed it to his chest, and bowed.
"I'll excuse myself for a moment," he said with a smile.
In the next moment, Lumian left the dream.
Swiftly shifting his sitting position, he leaned against a broken stone pillar. From his Traveler's Bag, he retrieved Gardner Martin's Beyonder characteristic, teeth, blood, Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard's venom, hornbeam essential oil, and other items.
He had genuinely sensed Hisoka's fear, anger, and frustration. Although it occurred in a dream, it was reflected in Hisoka's brain and body, real and intense.
He was about to concoct the Reaper potion.

Chapter 650: Reaper

In the ancient, crumbling palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian carefully poured Gardner Martin's blood into a measuring cylinder and added the unusually sharp, small white bone blade that emitted a cold light.

During this process, he moved swiftly, paying no attention to the bone-blade-shaped Beyonder characteristic slicing his fingers and causing blood to flow. Instead, he ignited crimson flames, helping the wounds contract and preventing the white bone blade from entering the potion with his blood.

The physical pain heightened Lumian's clarity and excitement. He added Gardner Martin's two teeth, the Colorful Bearded Horned Lizard's venom, and the hornbeam essential oil into the bright red blood.

Bloop! Bloop! Bubbles bubbled in the blood, and the items mysteriously dissolved.

Soon, black iron dregs emerged from the bright-red blood, as if an iron weapon had shattered inside.

Lumian glanced at the still-slumbering "Hisoka" Twanaku, picked up the measuring cylinder, and poured the liquid into his mouth.

The pungent smell of blood, the unfamiliar taste of rust, and the burning sensation instantly filled Lumian's mouth and pierced his brain.

It felt like being caught in a chaotic war, constantly facing blades, firearms, and relentless enemy assaults. Wounds appeared all over his body, throbbing with pain.

Son of a sow, am I being attacked by a potion? Lumian muttered, bewildered, as he found himself locked in combat with a swarm of oncoming adversaries.

Fireballs, Fire Ravens, and blazing white spears shattered, tore through, or impaled the enemies, turning them into torches that illuminated the battlefield.

After an unknown span of time, Lumian felt his strength waning, his spiritual energy on the brink of exhaustion. The accumulated spirituality of an Ascetic had long been unleashed.

In that moment, a colossal figure materialized before him, radiating a formidable and intimidating aura.

Despite Lumian's weakening state, he sensed the colossal figure's fear, hatred, and frustration.

He's afraid of me... Lumian realized suddenly. Summoning the last shreds of his courage, he condensed a blazing white flaming spear and hurled it at the colossal figure.

A blinding white flame erupted, piercing through the colossal

figure's head.
Rumble. The giant figure exploded from within, shattering into countless fragments.
Rumble. The entire battlefield crumbled.
Lumian shook off the daze and found himself in front of a crumbling ancient palace, its stone bricks weathered by time. Hisoka Twanaku still slumbered, and Hela stood silently by his side.
Sweat dripped from Lumian's body, bursting into crimson sparks.
Eventually, the sweat returned to normal.
Phew... Lumian let out a relieved breath. His spirituality was rapidly recovering.
He had advanced to become a Reaper.
Having completed the ritual of capturing a higher Sequence enemy alive and revealing his conspiracy, Lumian had consumed the potion and advanced to Sequence 5, a Reaper of the Hunter pathway.
Compared to his previous Sequences, Reaper bestowed three additional abilities:
The first, Weakness Investigation, allowed Lumian to discern the target's vulnerabilities and weak points in their defenses from a mystic perspective.
The second, Cull, could be infused into any attack to harvest the target's life. Any part struck by Cull was akin to an assault on vital points and weaknesses, dealing significant damage.
If Cull hit a genuine weakness or vital point, it could deliver a fatal blow, making it challenging for the target to withstand three consecutive attacks.
It could even inflict real damage on demigod-level creatures, provided they didn't block or successfully evade, and refrained from using mystic defenses.
The third, Precision, enabled Lumian to precisely target a predetermined location and manipulate fireballs, Fire Ravens, and other spells that had left his body.
He could split a colossal fireball into hundreds, striking different targets with precision, achieving effective area-of-effect damage.
It was a far cry from a blanket explosion, being more efficient and effective.
Both Cull and Precision demanded a substantial amount of spirituality, rivaling Lumian's current usage of teleportation.
The exception was the combination of Precision and Fire Raven, as Fire Raven could allocate a bit of spirituality and was easily manipulated. Even with Precision, its consumption of spirituality wasn't significant.

Lumian also felt a significant enhancement in his spirituality. His mind cleared, and his life force intensified. He could compress flames to a blazing white state in an incredibly short time, merging with flaming spears and swiftly covering dozens to hundreds of meters. Ignoring the spirituality consumption, he could travel using this method.
While Lumian's strength, speed, and physique had improved, he was still not resilient enough to withstand a bullet with his body.
...
At the entrance of the mostly collapsed male bathroom in the Matani Import and Export Shop, the silver-white full-body armor burst out, wielding a light-condensed hammer in both hands.
It searched left and right but couldn't locate its target. Gradually, it seemed to "calm down."
From a nearby shadow, Franca emerged, her eyes assessing Kolobo within the half-collapsed bathroom. His life wasn't at risk, but his injuries were significant, and he appeared weakened.
He'll be Pride Armor's next target... Franca thought quickly. Seizing the moment while Pride Armor was still on the lookout for the backstabber and hadn't chosen a new target, she swiftly approached. Franca grabbed the motionless silver full-body armor and deftly stowed it into her Traveler's Bag.
"Meet up with Jenna!" Franca called out to Anthony, positioned outside the corridor.
In an instant, she melted into the shadows, disappearing from sight.
...
Surveying his newfound abilities, Lumian felt a surge of delight. Is this Reaper... If I were to confront Hisoka now, breaking through his defenses wouldn't be a concern. My craving for combat and slaughter has intensified... Having adapted to the changes in his body, Lumian turned to Hela and expressed his gratitude.
"Thank you."
Hela, not seeing any cause for gratitude, sighed and commented, "Your team's teamwork is impressive."
"Madame Hela, the ritual has succeeded, but I wish to enter Hisoka's dream again and inquire about something else," Lumian requested.
Hela nodded in agreement.
"The ritual requires him to remain lucid. He might lie, but the questioning doesn't need him to be lucid."
As she finished speaking, Lumian suddenly closed his eyes, slumping to the ground against a dilapidated stone pillar.
The corners of his mouth remained curled up, and his expression

gradually turned calm.
In the dream's interrogation room, Lumian took a seat across from Hisoka and addressed the captive, whose malice and desire to kill were no longer concealed.
"Thank you for your help. I've become a Reaper."
Hisoka, leaning forward, seemed to forget that he could attack.
"So what if you're a Reaper? In a duel, I'd still kill you easily!
"If you hadn't joined forces with Hidden Blade and relied on numbers, you would have been dead!"
No longer lucid, he's finally revealing his true thoughts in the dream... Lumian chuckled and responded, "If I can create an opportunity to fight with numbers, why should I face you one-on-one?
"My companions are also a part of my strength."
Hisoka spoke with malice, "Do you truly trust that Hypnotist?
"It's very dangerous to open up your body and mind to a Hypnotist. Aren't you afraid that he'll take the opportunity to leave some hidden cues that will unknowingly bring you under his control?"
Lumian gazed at Hisoka for a moment before breaking into a smile.
"Perhaps that's why I defeated you. No wonder Mad Lady said you weren't pure enough.
"Firstly, I do trust him. We've been through life and death together.
"Secondly, I'm willing to take such a risk to kill all of you!"
Straightening up, Lumian locked eyes with Hisoka, enunciating each word, "Even if I plunge into the Abyss, even if I descend into hell, I shall witness your tragic demise!"
Hisoka fell silent.
Lumian eased back into his seat, composed himself, and casually inquired, "I learned from Devilology that a Devil requires a ritual to advance to Desire Apostle. It's best if it's a special serial killing ritual. However, other than the one four years ago, there's only been one in Port Pylos recently. Furthermore, I've already killed the murderer. How did you advance?
"With a boon? You couldn't have become a Desire Apostle four years ago, could you?"
Hisoka responded with a smile, "Just because you don't know doesn't mean it didn't happen."
Lumian's heart stirred.
"Was one of those two pranks to cover up your advancement ritual?"
Lumian ventured, drawing from the scattered information he had gleaned from the peripheral members of April Fool's. They were like scattered pieces of a puzzle, each offering a fragment of the

truth but lacking the full picture.
The tales spoke of chaos unleashed: a disappearance of gold in the depths of Devise, and a clash between townsfolk and a primitive tribe in Tizamo Town, resulting in tragedy.
Lumian suspected that Hisoka's advancement ritual had been shrouded within the chaos of Tizamo's prank.
Hisoka's eyes sparkled with approval, his tone paternal.
"You're quite perceptive."
Lumian seized the moment to shift the conversation.
"What's up with the Nois family's Demon?"
He treaded cautiously, sidestepping the Celestial Worthy and the Mother Tree of Desire, for now.
Hisoka's expression turned cold.
"I aimed to utilize him to acquire something and carry out a ritual to appease him repeatedly, but he only formed a connection with me. He only granted me an opportunity two years ago."
Something... Two years ago... The pranks in the gold mine city and the town of Tizamo took place after this. One happened at the close of the preceding year, while the other unfolded at the close of last year... Lumian started suspecting that these two pranks might have motives beyond concealing the advancement ritual.
Before he could delve deeper, Hisoka asked vehemently and frenziedly, "Why didn't you seek the Tarot Club's assistance this time?"
Lumian arched his eyebrows and inquired with confusion, "Why does it matter to you? Even without the Tarot Club's aid, I could have successfully dealt with you."

Chapter 651: An Unfulfilled Conspiracy

In the beige, four-story patrol team building, Camus had managed to break free from the poker card's influence. He discovered Sow sprawled in a pool of blood, brutally torn apart by two zombie-like undead creatures.

In neighboring rooms, another patrol team member, under Twanaku's control, put up a stubborn resistance. His comrades had already fallen victim to the relentless assault.

Camus, catching his breath, hadn't anticipated stumbling upon an assassination plot within the patrol team, putting his own life at risk.

His gaze fixed on Deputy Captain Reaza, a middle-aged man in a sleek black suit controlling the undead creatures. Confused, Camus inquired, "How did Sow end up joining the Rose School of Thought? "And why are so many members under their control?"

Despite Camus resisting the poker card's influence, Jenna's earlier shout lingered in his mind.

Reaza, surveying the scene of blood and undead, responded after a moment of contemplation, "It's likely Twanaku's doing."

Twanaku... Camus recalled the questions raised by Louis Berry.

Was Twanaku truly responsible for the serial murders four years ago?

Could he be a Devil in disguise?

Frowning, Camus grumbled, "Keeping a Zombie on the team was already a significant risk. Just because he can show restraint doesn't clear him from suspicion of being a Rose School of Thought member. He might indulge at specific times."

Reaza, with a stern demeanor, spoke in a deep voice, "We'd confirmed he defected from the Rose School of Thought. He believes in The Fool."

"The Fool, the temperance faction?" Camus asked in surprise, not expecting such a revelation.

...

In the dream's interrogation room, housed within the ancient and crumbling palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Hisoka couldn't contain his amusement at Lumian's question.

"If you had sought the Tarot Club's assistance, I could have killed you!"

Hisoka's laughter reverberated, and his black shadow danced on the wall, morphing into curved goat horns and colossal bat wings.

Lumian caught a whiff of a conspiracy and asked in confusion and curiosity, "Why do you think so?"

Hisoka rose, a murderous glint materializing in his eyes.

"If you involve the Tarot Club, they'll undoubtedly seek my aid in your investigation."
At this point, Hisoka's lips curled into an unusually flamboyant smile.
No longer conscious in the dream, he revealed his innermost self.
Lumian raised an eyebrow, asking, "Are you a Minor Arcana card holder?"
Hisoka shook his head, replying with a radiant smile, "I'm a member of the temperance faction, a devotee of Mr. Fool."
The Devil burst into laughter, bowing and exclaiming, "Praise The Fool!"
Lumian, finding it absurd and amusing, instinctively analyzed the situation.
Hisoka is actually a member of the Rose School of Thought's temperance faction? A flamboyant and malicious Devil is actually a member of the temperance faction?
Logically speaking, this was clearly impossible!
Yet, in this dream crafted by Hela, unless Hisoka possessed unique abilities to deceive, lying was unlikely.
The only plausible explanation: he had infiltrated the temperance faction through deception and deceit!
On the surface, Hisoka seemed to be a Beyonder of the Prisoner pathway, displaying a level of restraint. As a non-core member of the temperance faction, he might have gone unnoticed with his issues.
Right, is this why the Matani patrol team allowed a Prisoner pathway Beyonder to join?
This was more than four years ago. Back then, Hisoka was merely a Sequence 8 Lunatic of the Prisoner pathway, not yet a Mid-Sequence Beyonder. As a peripheral member of the temperance faction, he likely operated without much scrutiny.
Moreover, he probably joined the temperance faction before this, when he was weaker and less noticeable.
Later, he faked receiving resources from the temperance faction and the Rose School of Thought's attack to advance. In reality, did he rely on the Mother Tree of Desire's boons? *Where did those resources go?* Were they secretly sold or crafted into a mystical item? That poker card?
Why did he infiltrate the temperance faction and worship Mr. Fool?
His main goal clearly isn't resources...
Faith in Mr. Fool...
With this in mind, Lumian suddenly had a guess.
Hisoka's true aim was to infiltrate the Church of The Fool through a certain pathway and have faith in Mr. Fool!

This revelation came from Celestial Worthy!
Hisoka genuinely believes in the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings. However, that Celestial Worthy is resisting Mr. Fool. He can clearly influence the Seer, Apprentice, and Marauder pathways...
Hisoka used a specific technique during prayer. On the surface, he seemed to be praying to Mr. Fool, but in reality, did he receive a message from that Celestial Worthy? This way, he wouldn't face the risk of a false premise...
That's very likely... Madam Magician mentioned that if I don't follow the procedures when praying to Mr. Fool, the response might not be from him, but from the Celestial Worthy...
Why did Celestial Worthy make Hisoka do this?
Marauder... Steal... Could It be that He intends to gradually steal Mr. Fool's identity and faith through this method?
When many believers genuinely believe in Mr. Fool, but they equate him as the Celestial Worthy, the Celestial Worthy becomes The Fool?
Hiss, the more I think about it, the more terrifying it becomes...
Hisoka can't do it alone. There must be many others who share similar beliefs...
Impressive. If the Celestial Worthy usually gathers followers, the Tarot Club would wipe them out at the slightest hint. Yet, if their followers outwardly professed faith in Mr. Fool, not only would they escape destruction, but they'd also gain protection...
How devious...
Lumian swiftly deduced the situation, sensing the ominous pressure from the hidden Celestial Worthy.
Once marked by Him, failure could creep in unnoticed and strike him down unexpectedly!
Considering this, Lumian recalled Port Pylos and grasped Hisoka's confidence. He also comprehended why Hisoka had opted to remain and wait patiently.
Freshly arrived in the Southern Continent and stepping into Port Pylos for the first time, Lumian lacked resources, companions, and even knowledge of Dutanese. There was a high likelihood that he'd seek aid from the Tarot Club standing behind him.
The Major Arcana card holders of the Tarot Club wouldn't personally intervene without a clear target due to the uncertain timeframe. They would likely dispatch a Minor Arcana card holder familiar with the Southern Continent or a faction member to assist.
Under these circumstances, who better to meet the requirements than Twanaku Tupián, a Church of The Fool's temperance faction member from Matani, well-versed in the local situation, holding

the appropriate official status, and reaching Sequence 6.
In that scenario, Lumian and Hisoka would investigate Hisoka. The other party would gradually grasp the situation, assess potential traps and their effectiveness. Hisoka could then seize the opportunity for a surprise attack, assault the mind, and trigger desires!
Contemplating this, Lumian acknowledged that if he failed to detect Hisoka's malice during the investigation, the chances of succumbing to Hisoka's hands were 100%. He'd be a spectator as the Devil faced off against Termiboros in the form of a soul fragment.
Hisoka, informed by Loki, should have made preparations to deal with the dangerous creature within the seal. Perhaps relying on the Nois family's Demon or his status as a Blessed of the Mother Tree of Desire.
Thankfully, Madam Magician kept reminding me that a Hunter can't rely on high-ranking individuals behind an organization for everything. I need to hone my skills, familiarize myself with conspiracies and battles. Otherwise, I might have sought guidance from the Tarot Club as soon as I arrived in Port Pyro...
That would have been dangerous...
Grande Soeur and Emperor Roselle both mentioned that the most dangerous places are often the safest. Now, I must add that those who seem the safest and most reliable might pose the greatest risk...
It's not that they're no longer trustworthy, but the enemy will exploit this sense of security.
Yes, Madam Magician has also emphasized that if anything seems awry with her orders and suggestions, I should ignore them. Quickly contacting the other Major Arcana card holders to confirm the situation is crucial.
Lumian gazed at the flamboyant Hisoka and smiled.
"If I hadn't received help from a special trace expert, if Hidden Blade hadn't been more familiar with your persona, and if I hadn't had a Psychiatrist to profile you, and ultimately failed to find any clues or direction, I would have sought the Tarot Club's help and looked for a guide familiar with the local situation."
Hisoka fell into silence. After a few moments, he spoke up, "I get everything else, but why the sudden need for a special trace expert?"
Lumian chuckled.
"Because it's a gift from a true god."
The more time Lumian spent with Ludwig, the more he felt that letting such a dangerous individual escape the Church's control

wasn't a decision a high-ranking member of the Church of Knowledge would make. There had to be a revelation from the God of Knowledge and Wisdom.
Certainly, Lumian couldn't be sure. As far as he knew, the Knowledge pathway, also known as the Reader pathway, excelled in prophecies at high Sequence.
Hisoka fell into silence for a moment before unleashing a roar, much like a wild wolf howling beneath the moon.
Lumian reviewed the entire incident, realizing that this revenge was a clash of conspiracies. Unfortunately, Hisoka didn't grasp his personality and style well enough, nor did he comprehend his companions. He could only rely on the sea prayer ritual and Loki's first death as a guide. Consequently, there was a deviation, shattering his expectations despite a high likelihood of success.
Phew... Lumian exhaled and inquired, "Who were the ones causing havoc on the patrol team's side?"

Chapter 652: "Extreme Joy Begets Sorrow"

Upon hearing Lumian's question, Hisoka's lips curved into a smile.
"Those are a few Fallen, under my control."
"Fallen?" Lumian could understand the literal meaning, but he didn't grasp the situation.
Simultaneously, he criticized Hisoka.
This is truly a dream. Emotions change so quickly.
Hisoka reminisced, "A Desire Apostle can plant a seed in others' hearts when their emotions and desires clearly fluctuate, causing corresponding problems to worsen. Gradually, they lose control and degenerate.
"When combined with my special abilities, I can make those humans unable to escape my control and obey only me for a long period through repeated depravities."
It's akin to injecting addictive psychiatric drugs, but more mystical? Lumian searched for analogous examples from an easy-to-understand perspective.
Suddenly, he recalled Naboredisley's description of Demons: "Demon in body, Demon in mind..."
Could this be a manifestation of the Demon within the mind? Is Hisoka's distinctiveness reflected in this aspect? Could it be that the individual from the temperance faction liaising with him has been tainted by his influence, causing them to withhold reporting any irregularities? Lumian gazed thoughtfully at Hisoka and inquired, "Indeed, as one would expect from an Apostle of Desire, a Demon that seduces the darkness of the mind. Is this a ritual for ascending to a Demon?"
"Just acclimating for now," Hisoka didn't refute, yet he sensed the current situation was far from ideal. It felt more like a rehearsal.
"You seem quite assured. Following the incident in Tizamo Town at year's end, you likely ascended to a Desire Apostle. It's only been a year, and you're already contemplating becoming a demigod?" Lumian mused briefly before questioning, "Is it because you finally appeased that Demon from the Nois family and acquired that thing?"
Even in his reverie, Hisoka appeared hesitant to disclose this matter. He responded with a hint of reluctance, "Yes."
Lumian refrained from provoking Hisoka for the time being, ensuring the dream didn't end prematurely. He altered his question.
"Where is that thing?"
When Hisoka transformed into a Devil, his attire ruptured, and nothing unusual dropped.

Hisoka's countenance contorted as he responded, "I-in Tizamo Town."
Concealed in his body's hometown, Tizamo Town... If it's significant, why doesn't he carry it with him? Lumian's curiosity about the two pranks orchestrated by Hisoka in Tizamo Town and the gold mine city, Devise, intensified.
After a brief pause of contemplation, Lumian inquired, "You staged a prank in Devise just to pilfer a batch of gold?"
"Yes," Hisoka affirmed.
Have you consumed too many novels like the Gold Heist? Were you in dire need of such a large sum of money back then? Yes, for criminals, it's quite normal to plan an operation to snatch gold when necessary. Unlike me, who relies on hunting and the gifts of villains... Just as Lumian thought it was trivial, he suddenly considered something.
Franca has been accumulating gold for future sacrifices to the Armored Shadow, Chen Tu...
Could Hisoka have orchestrated a prank to obtain a substantial amount of gold for a similar sacrifice? Lumian scrutinized Hisoka and probed, "Did you offer the gold as a sacrifice to the Nois family's Demon?"
Hisoka replied nonchalantly, "In Tizamo Town."
"What's in Tizamo Town?" Lumian asked.
Hisoka appeared to snap out of his daze and exclaimed with a contorted expression, "Dream Festival, Dream Festival!"
His shadow surged to life, leaping onto him and shrouding him.
Hisoka reverted to pitch-black, transforming into a viscous, repulsive, and malevolent liquid that spread swiftly in all directions, as if determined to corrupt the interrogation room, Lumian, and the entire dream.
Lumian promptly exited the dream and observed Hisoka, who lay asleep on the ground, displaying signs of Devilification once more. Furthermore, he seemed somewhat translucent.
This key member of April Fool's was teetering on the brink of losing control!
Without hesitation, Lumian materialized a longsword crafted from blazing white flames in his hand.
The Hisoka figure before him emitted a myriad of colors, with the pale-white mark on the bridge of his nose being the least conspicuous.
Weakness Investigation!
Paleness signified a vulnerability.
Lumian hoisted the flaming sword, gripping it with both hands, and thrust downward, vanishing into the pale-white hue.

The Devil-like armor, resilient flesh, and steel-like bones bestowed by Zombie endured only a second before being pierced.
Lumian withdrew his blazing-white flaming sword and thrust down again.
Pfft!
This time, it penetrated deeper.
Lumian extracted the blazing-white flaming sword once more and leaped up, adding his weight to the downward thrust.
Pfft!
Lumian genuflected, and the flaming sword plunged into Hisoka's brain, transforming into scattered flames that obliterated all weakness.
Lumian withdrew his hands and stood up.
Hisoka's body, displaying signs of Devilification, twitched a few times before settling.
Adjacent to the bridge of his nose, a two-finger-wide wound appeared grotesquely abnormal. Its surface was charred and contracted, while flames surged from within.
The Devil had lost his life.
How resilient. He managed to withstand three strikes like this...
Lumian gazed at Hisoka's corpse and silently sighed.
In that moment, Hisoka's corpse swiftly turned transparent, and his light brown skin gradually faded to pale-white.
Wraith... Transforming into a genuine wraith after death? Just as these thoughts crossed Lumian's mind, his surroundings abruptly darkened.
In the depths of the darkness, a serene chant resonated, soothing one's body and mind, inducing a reluctance to do anything but lie still.
All escape was tranquility.
Hisoka's wraith form halted its transformation, gradually gaining a tangible quality.
Finally, he perished completely.
What a formidable adversary to vanquish... If his wraith transformation hadn't been halted, could he have endured as a true wraith, evolving into an evil spirit in the future? Lumian glanced at Hela beside him and spoke once more, "Thank you."
He refrained from elaborating his conversation with Hisoka, recognizing that they had spoken in the dream created by Hela. She must be aware of it.
"Loki is the only one left," Hela said coldly, her gaze fixed on Hisoka's lifeless form.
Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before stating, "He can't be resurrected more than a few times."

"At most one more time," Hela replied with certainty.
Another time... Lumian tersely acknowledged.
Before long, Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic manifested, blending with the remaining goat horns above his head, transforming into a whimsical and flamboyant cluster of black crystals.
Various crystals extended in all directions, sharp and crooked. Multiple illusory, translucent faces emerged from each black crystal, their expressions alternating between malevolence, pain, madness, and confusion.
A Desire Apostle Beyonder characteristic corrupted by a Wraith boon? Lumian perceived it as more corrupting and perilous than the Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic from before.
He pointed at the Beyonder characteristic and Hisoka's lifeless body, addressing Hela, "Can I take them all?"
"Okay," Hela responded without objections.
...
In an old warehouse on an abandoned dock in Port Pylos, Franca, Anthony, and Jenna had already gathered, awaiting Lumian's return.
Amidst their conversation, a figure outlined itself in the sunlight streaming through a high window. It was Lumian, wearing a golden straw hat and disguised as Louis Berry.
Pa!
Lumian tossed Hisoka's corpse to the ground.
Immediately after, he retrieved the Beyonder characteristic from his Traveler's Bag and placed them near the corpse without touching them.
Only then did he smile at Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.
"It's settled."
"Is it really Hisoka?" Franca couldn't believe it could be so straightforward.
"It's him," Lumian briefly explained the situation. "He was overconfident and believed there's a high chance of killing me. He chose to stay and wait for an opportunity."
"What gave him the confidence?" Franca's eyes widened.
Since everyone present held a Minor Arcana card, Lumian didn't hold anything back. He recounted the situation, omitting the most perilous details.
"Can that really happen... Luckily, you didn't seek guidance from the Tarot Club." Jenna felt a lingering fear.
Franca sighed and commented, "I didn't think our collaboration alone would be sufficient."
Lumian pointed at the Beyonder characteristic and stated, "There's too much corruption, and it's very dangerous. I plan to seek

Madam Magician's help and find a suitable Artisan to transform it into a Sealed Artifact. Everyone has the right to use it."
Lumian found it too sinister and corrupting. It couldn't become a mystical item with relatively mild negative effects. It could only be the kind that required sealing.
"Absolutely." Franca was filled with anticipation as she imagined the potential abilities of a Sealed Artifact.
She suddenly recalled something and quickly blurted out, "Your Pride Armor is still in my possession. Tsk, you've really gotten the most out of it."
Lumian chuckled.
"How can I face Devils without a Warrior? I've always wanted to use the Pride Armor, but I didn't expect Hisoka to choose the most convenient place like the bathroom."
It was a confined, tight space with a certain degree of flexibility.
Franca retrieved the Pride Armor from her Traveler's Bag and placed it on the ground.
Suddenly, the air in the old warehouse froze.
The silver-white full-body armor turned to face Lumian, condensing into a broadsword of light. Then, it knelt on one knee and thrust into the ground.
Wh— Lumian's pupils dilated as his figure abruptly faded, disappearing from his spot.
The broadsword of light split open, transforming into a devastating storm that engulfed the surroundings, obliterating numerous wooden crates.
Wh— Franca, Jenna, and Anthony couldn't dodge in time and were shattered into fragments by the Hurricane of Light, reflecting brilliance.
"Dammit! Isn't this too vengeful? How much time has passed?!" Franca cursed from a corner of the warehouse.

Chapter 653: Lumian's Choice

Franca emerged from the shadows, exhaling a sigh of relief as she saw the silver-white full-body armor return to silence following Lumian's departure from the warehouse and the absence of weak targets.

With caution, she approached, making sure not to position herself behind the Pride Armor, finally standing face to face with it.

The Pride Armor remained motionless.

Franca extended her hands, barely lifting the silver-white full-body armor and tucking it back into her Traveler's Bag. Only then did she relax and call out, "It's all right, it's all right."

Jenna emerged from a dark corner on the other side, and Anthony suddenly appeared at the warehouse door, seemingly prepared to roll and escape at any moment.

In a matter of seconds, Lumian somersaulted back from a high window, eliciting a chuckle from Franca.

"Damn it, we managed Hisoka just fine, but our own Sealed Artifact nearly wiped us out. Good thing we had substitutes. Otherwise, we might have been severely injured, if not dead," she remarked.

Jenna commented calmly, "This could be a funny story for Ghost Face."

Having moved out of the market district, she now had plenty of free time. Though she still owed Franca a large sum of money, she had enough assets to cover it. Thus, while completing the Tarot Club mission and trying to act, she could afford to watch a play once a week, buy magazines, newspapers, and books she had longed for but couldn't justify purchasing, and indulge in department stores and certain restaurants she had once yearned for.

Franca let out a hollow laugh.

"Who would have thought this armor would hold such a grudge? Hey Lumian, what did you do to it?"

she inquired, directing the subsequent questions to Lumian.

Lumian spread his hands.

"Wasn't it just a backstab?

"I thought it would be fine after disengaging and waiting for it to calm down."

Franca nodded repeatedly, offering him a way out.

"That's right, I thought so too.

"It's all because of that armor! It doesn't feel like armor at all!"

After a moment of pondering, Franca said, "I wonder when it will forget that you stabbed it in the back. For now, you'll have to leave

it with me."
"Alright," Lumian said, feeling a twinge of regret. Such a useful Sealed Artifact was temporarily unusable.
He glanced at Hisoka's severely damaged corpse and the seemingly unscathed Beyonder characteristic, stowing them away in his Traveler's Bag. He said seriously, "I hope that the operation against the Minister of Industry will commence after the Sealed Artifact is completed. Though its negative effects will undoubtedly be severe, Desire Apostle and Wraith are definitely very useful, even if they can only unleash a portion of their abilities."
"Indeed," Franca replied, filled with anticipation.
She then turned to Lumian and asked, "Hisoka is already dead. You've achieved your goal in the Southern Continent. Where are you going next? Are you returning to Trier with us?"
Lumian shook his head, as if he had already considered the answer to this question.
"I plan to stay in the Southern Continent for a while longer."
"Why? To investigate Tizamo Town and the Hisoka matter? That doesn't seem necessary," Jenna expressed her confusion.
Lumian chuckled.
"This is a Hunter's paradise, don't you think?"
Without waiting for Franca and the others to inquire further, Lumian explained seriously, "After all that has transpired, I've come to realize something. For a Hunter to act well and digest swiftly, they must undergo diverse experiences.
"What I mean is, a Hunter's path is more straightforward compared to other paths. It's unlike Demonesses who must navigate pleasure, pain, while contemplating abstract and philosophical concepts which are often more intricate.
"As long as a Hunter is immersed in chaos, conflict, and constant combat, they can excel. Combat is akin to hunting. Chaos and conflict invariably breed numerous conspiracies. Provocation smoothens these conspiracies, arson secures victory in battle, and the aftermath of such incidents reaps the lives of enemies and the spoils of victory."
Observing Franca, Jenna, and Anthony's puzzled expressions, Lumian smiled and continued, "It's been just over half a year since I ascended from Sequence 9 to Sequence 5. Why?
"Because I've been either passively or actively embroiled in a series of events. Through perpetual chaos, disputes, and battles, I've grasped the principles of performance and found opportunities to act."
"In essence, a Hunter doesn't engage in elaborate acting before reaching High-Sequence Beyonder status. Though I possess some

insight into fate due to my characteristics, it's also linked to determination and willpower. It's an integral part of combat.
"Hunters are forged in the crucible of blood and fire. They thrive amidst chaos and conflict. If I aim to grow stronger, I must pursue these elements. The Southern Continent offers precisely that."
Thus, Lumian could swiftly assimilate the Reaper potion and strive to become a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator of the Inevitability pathway.
Only by truly mastering some of fate's abilities could Lumian hope to uncover any connection between Loki and the ancient castle when he next confronted him.
According to Franca, Lumian had to locate the respawn point of an enemy capable of resurrection and camp there!
Certainly, the path to becoming a Fate Appropriator came with its own set of risks. Lumian's chances of encountering Circle Inhabitant Voisin Sanson would significantly rise, whether due to the convergence of an Outer Deity's Blessed resulting from the world's rejection or the convergence of Inevitability powers.
Despite his yearning for such an encounter, Lumian was aware that he wasn't prepared to face a demigod, lacking the corresponding strength. A high-level Beyonder he could hire wouldn't be able to constantly keep an eye on him, and the moment of encounter was beyond his control.
Franca couldn't hide her envy upon hearing Lumian's plan.
If only the Demoness pathway's acting were that straightforward.
The early stages with Assassins and Instigators were relatively direct, but as time went on, it became more complicated.
Sigh. When I first met Lumian, I was clearly at a higher Sequence and stronger than him. It's only been half a year, but the tables have turned... Franca felt a mix of sorrow and impulsive emotions.
After sending Franca, Jenna, and Anthony back to Trier, Lumian entered Suite 7 on B3 of Hotel Orella, signaling for Lugano to leave.
Then, he carefully extracted Hisoka's lifeless body from his Traveler's Bag and positioned it in front of Ludwig. With a grin, he remarked, "Here's my end of the bargain. Is it edible?"
Ludwig, clutching a silver child's knife and fork with a steak laid out before him, sprung up from his seat. As he examined the torn, half-Devil-like, and bloodied remains, a mix of desire and hesitation played across his face.
It was clear he was tempted but wary.
After more than ten seconds, Ludwig delicately picked up the child's utensils and resolved himself.
"A tiny bit."
Without awaiting Lumian's reply, he crouched down and extended

the child's knife and fork toward Hisoka's still open, flaxen-colored eyes.
Amidst the slicing sounds, Ludwig retrieved the Devil-like eyeballs, one on the fork and the other on the knife's tip.
Then, he poured a glass of orange Gwadar with one hand.
"There's caffeine in this. Not suitable for children," Lumian pointed out.
Ludwig glanced at the enticing beverage, then at the eyeballs on the child's utensils, and the half-Devil corpse on the ground. He fell silent.
Lumian also fell silent.
After a few moments, Ludwig submerged the eyeballs into the orange-yellow Gwadar, deliberately puncturing more holes with his fork to allow the liquid to seep out.
Then, he lifted the drink and squatted beside Hisoka's corpse, bringing the glass to a spot where some blood still dripped.
Bloop! Bloop! Bloop! Three drops of sulfur-scented blood fell into the fading orange beverage, swiftly tinting it with the color of blood.
Ludwig swirled the liquid in the glass and consumed it.
Lumian observed as Ludwig finished his drink, noting a clear boost in energy. Curious, he inquired, "What's the effect of this?"
Ludwig licked his lips and responded, "Permanently enhances my spirituality, allowing me to keenly sense the aura of the Abyss. I can also command a few lower-level undead creatures.
"Only the first glass has this effect. Subsequent drinks of a similar nature can only temporarily heighten my perception and restore some spirituality."
Ludwig's tone carried a maturity as he spoke on such matters.
Not bad... but only you would dare to consume such a messy thing... Lumian criticized inwardly. He stowed away Hisoka's remains and retreated to his bedroom, initiating a letter to Madam Magician. The focus was on reporting Hisoka's apparent identity, his speculations, and the issues with Tizamo Town. Additionally, he proposed that the reward for these unexpected discoveries should be the transformation of Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic into a Sealed Artifact.
Having neatly folded the letter, Lumian produced a jagged black crystal clump and arranged a ritual. He called forth Madam Magician's doll messenger.
Upon its emergence, the doll messenger emitted a disdainful sound, pinching its nose.
It pointed at Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic and remarked in a sharp voice,

"Pack it into a box! It's filthy!"
Lumian retrieved a small paper box from his Traveler's Bag and stuffed the black crystal clump inside.
"Tie it up."
"Stuff it in another box."
"Use another box to contain them."
The doll messenger continued with its requests.
Finally, it begrudgingly picked up the box and carried the letter away.
...
Port Pylos's patrol team.
Reaza informed Camus, "All the problematic team members have been purged. The rest are undergoing individual reviews. You are part of it too."
"How's Kolobo?" Camus asked with concern.
"He's fine. We went to the Earth Mother Church to hire a Doctor," Reaza replied calmly. "The major issue now is that we haven't apprehended Twanaku. Moreover, we're certain that he's both a Wraith and a Desire Apostle."
"How? Isn't he too powerful?" Camus felt a twinge of fear at the thought of potential retaliation from Twanaku.
At that moment, a patrol team member entered the office and informed Reaza and Camus, "Captain Reaza, Boss, the straw hat guy is back!"

Chapter 654: Bounty

Louis Berry is back again? Camus's forehead twitched at the mention of the "straw hat guy."

Since encountering the adventurer, his life had taken a tumultuous turn. First, he had "captured" the murderer in a serial killing case, then he unearthed clues related to a four-year-old case. Subsequently, the suspect had emerged, attempting to harm him and Kolobo, throwing the patrol team into chaos.

And now, Louis Berry was making another appearance?

Camus felt the weight on his chest, and his heart raced.

"Where is Louis Berry?" Reaza was already familiar with Camus's account.

The patrol team member who had brought the report hastily answered, "Sitting in the hall."

Reaza nodded, and he and Camus left the office, descending the stairs.

As they walked, Camus gradually snapped out of his daze.

He recalled Louis Berry's suspicions about Twanaku the previous day, how he had abandoned his theories without delving into specifics, and how the adventurer had sought him out early in the morning, hoping to gather information indirectly. Shortly after Kolobo handed over Twanaku's information, the latter had been attacked, leading to a fierce battle.

Did Louis Berry employ such a cautious inquiry to avoid triggering the Devil's Danger Premonition? Was buying information from Kolobo a trap targeting Twanaku? No, hadn't Twanaku sensed the corresponding danger? He could only sense it a minute or two in advance, and would it be too late by the time he discovered it? As a former Public Security Officer and now an Interrogator, Camus swiftly made connections and speculations.

He believed that Louis Berry had likely identified Twanaku after learning about his preference for sugarless Fermo coffee. He hinted at suspicions regarding the police headquarters but refrained from going into specifics, fearing that Twanaku might foresee danger!

As for how Louis Berry set a trap for Twanaku without detection, Camus couldn't puzzle it out for now.

Furthermore, he suspected that Louis Berry's operation hadn't been entirely successful. There were no signs from the Matani Import and Export Shop indicating Twanaku's demise.

This was a Sequence 5 Desire Apostle, wielding the power of a Sequence 5 Wraith. Unless a demigod personally intervened, they might require two or three battle teams of Mid-Sequence Beyonders from pathways like Sun and Warrior to handle him.

Alternatively, they needed to mobilize Beyonders at the level of a Sequence 5 Pirate Admiral, armed with potent mystical items.
Soon, Camus and Reaza spotted Louis Berry seated on the sofa in the hall's guest area, his golden straw hat standing out in the sunlight.
"Monsieur Louis Berry, what brings you here again?" Camus inquired in deep Intisian.
Louis Berry gave Camus a deep look before smiling and addressing Reaza in fluent Dutanese, "I'm here to collect the bounty."
As he spoke, he retrieved Twanaku's head from his Traveler's Bag.
Camus and Reaza observed the blood-stained face, the head with the broken horn, the vacant eyes, and the gruesome wound on the bridge of the nose, along with ten to twenty deep cuts.
Despite the severe damage, Camus, a former Public Security Officer, recognized the owner at a glance.
Twanaku Tupián!
He succeeded? Had he truly set a trap for a Desire Apostle and managed to defeat him? Camus's gaze shifted up, scrutinizing Louis Berry, a young man with the title of a great adventurer in the Fog Sea.
Such strength could rival any Pirate Admiral in the Five Seas!
Of course, this assessment applied only to individual abilities, excluding the subordinates of Pirate Admirals.
Reaza silently ascertained from a spiritual level. He turned to Camus and asked in Dutanese,
"Is it Twanaku?"
"Yes," Camus confirmed, sighing inwardly.
The battle between Twanaku and Louis Berry had been fierce, resulting in his tragic demise. Not only were his eyes absent, but he was also covered in wounds, displaying signs of Devilification.
Reaza looked at Lumian and pondered for a moment before speaking in Dutanese, "I wonder if you've seen Twanaku's wanted poster. The bounty is only 70,000 verl d'or."
Back then, the bounty was set based on the criteria of a Serial Killer. It was only increased by 20,000 because this particular Serial Killer targeted Beyonders.
Lumian barely understood and switched to Intisian with a smile.
"If I wait two days to collect the bounty, will I be able to get more?"
Upon hearing this, Camus pondered for a moment and realized the validity of the statement.
In two days, their wanted posters would depict Desire Apostle and Wraith Twanaku, who had caused the deaths of several members of the patrol team, not the Serial Killer from the past!
Of course, with Matani's financial resources, it was impossible to

significantly raise the bounty. At most, they could double it and report the danger to the Church of Earth Mother, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, and other official organizations in the Northern Continent to see if they would be willing to increase the bounty.
After Camus translated Lumian's words into Dutanese, Reaza remained silent, unsure of how to respond.
For the patrol team, 70,000 to 80,000 verl d'or was a substantial sum!
Without waiting for a response, Lumian added with a smile, "But there's no need to add to the bounty. Just fulfill two of my requests. Two simple ones."
"What are they?" Reaza asked in a deep voice after hearing Camus's translation.
Lumian chuckled in response, stating, "Firstly, I want to see all the dossiers related to Tizamo Town. Secondly, I'm very curious about Twanaku's card and want to take a look. Of course, I'll just take a look."
"You want to investigate last year's incident in Tizamo Town? Isn't your sole purpose in Port Pylos to find Twanaku?" Camus asked, puzzled.
Lumian chuckled.
"Need I remind you? Twanaku's hometown is Tizamo Town."
Wh— Camus suddenly felt that the matter with Twanaku wouldn't conclude with the other party's death. There were still many secrets hidden behind it.
Louis Berry had mentioned this from the beginning.
After translating their conversation for Reaza, Camus sensed that the patrol team's previous investigation of the Tizamo Town incident might have concluded too hastily.
Eyeing Louis Berry, who had successfully taken down a Desire Apostle wielding Wraith powers, the chilly Reaza fell silent for a few seconds before uttering, "Who tasked you with looking into Twanaku?"
Without giving a direct response, Lumian inquired, "Did he declare himself a member of the temperance faction, a follower of The Fool?"
"It's not a self-proclamation. We verified it," Reaza confidently replied after hearing Camus's translation.
As anticipated... Just making confirmation, Lumian stood up for the Church of The Fool, stating, "Traitors can surface in any organization, and there'll be individuals with hidden agendas attempting to infiltrate."
"That's indeed our problem," Camus sincerely concluded. "We

shouldn't solely rely on the organization they're affiliated with to determine a person's character or whether they can be recruited. We also need to observe their words and actions."
After careful consideration, Reaza agreed to Lumian's request.
While assigning another patrol team member to aid Lumian in the process and collect the bounty, he instructed Camus to show Lumian the poker card.
...
In the cold and silent underground corridor, Camus gazed at Lumian and cautiously asked, "What are you investigating?"
This had already led to the death of a Sequence 5 Desire Apostle!
Lumian emitted a soft chuckle.
"It's dangerous to know too much."
Camus fell silent, wisely choosing not to inquire further, drawing from past experiences.
As Lumian advanced, he casually asked, "How many members of the patrol team perished this time?"
"Four. All under Twanaku's control." Camus gave a self-deprecating smile. "We'll be recruiting new members before the end of the year. They're fortunate. Those with suitable pathways don't have to worry about subsequent Sequence potions. If they aren't from the correct pathways, they can use Sealed Artifacts."
This was how the resources of an official organization gradually accumulated.
Lumian nodded slightly.
"How's Kolobo?"
Camus's smile grew more relaxed.
"He's fine. He's almost healed."
As they conversed, they arrived at a room adorned with cold bones. A metallic poker card lay on the table in the middle.
"Be careful. It will burrow into your body and control you like a Wraith," Camus warned.
Lumian nodded slightly and approached, reaching out for the card with the ten of spades on its face.
A bone-like sensation entered his mind, accompanied by a chilling cold.
Lumian's right hand quickly became encased in a layer of frost.
The frost rapidly crystallized and extended towards his arm.
Simultaneously, the card's surface underwent a transformation, revealing a grayish-white joker.
It rapidly etherealized, poised to merge with Lumian's body.
Silently, Lumian's arm burst into brilliant white flames. With a swift flick of his palm, he accurately pressed his thumb onto the poker card that hadn't completely dissipated, right onto the joker's

face.
The poker card fell into silence.
Frost detached from Lumian's arm, descended to the ground, and melted into water.
Zombie's Frost, Wraith's Possession... This is really a mystical item from the Prisoner pathway... Lumian swiftly made a basic assessment.
However, the transformation abilities displayed by the poker cards didn't align with his understanding of the Prisoner pathway. Instead, they resembled superficial applications of a Faceless.
Could it be corruption brought about by the Celestial Worthy? Also, when the temperance faction provides resources, it's impossible to directly give Wraith. They start from low Sequences and work their way up... Did this poker card strengthen time and time again? Does Hisoka have a permanent Artisan collaborator? Lumian withdrew his gaze from the poker card and slowly retreated to Camus's side.
"I'm done," he thought for a moment and said, "Be careful when using this item."
Camus nodded.
"We'll treat it as a Sealed Artifact rather than a mystical item."
Upon returning to the surface, Camus gathered all the dossiers related to Tizamo Town.
Lumian sorted through the items and picked up one of them.

Chapter 655: Pleasure

Lumian carefully examined the dossier on the Tizamo Town tragedy, which unfolded at the close of the previous year.

It detailed the incident as a gentleman and his servant's hunting expedition in Tizamo Town's primitive forest. Their actions provoked a large primitive tribe, leading to a retaliatory surprise attack on Tizamo Town. The assault resulted in numerous casualties, including the gentleman, his servant, several patrol team members responsible for Tizamo Town's security, and many innocent civilians.

In response, Admiral Querarill deployed additional troops to safeguard the area, prompting the primitive tribe to retreat into the depths of the forest.

There are quite a few formidable tribes inhabiting the Southern Continent's primitive forests... Lumian sighed from the bottom of his heart after reading the dossier.

This situation, a historical relic from the Balam Empire era, was emblematic of the challenges faced by the region.

While ancient empires boasted numerous powerful individuals in their ranks, along with a substantial number of Low- to Mid-Sequence Beyonders, effective management faced limitations. Technical constraints, population size, and the diversity of characteristics restricted governance to cities with favorable geographical conditions. These included towns and villages surrounding these cities, fertile plains, pastures, and valleys. The more challenging terrains, like primitive forests and mountains, remained largely unexplored due to these limitations, providing little incentive for the empires to eliminate potential threats.

When the Northern Continent invaded, causing the fragmentation of the Balam Empire and the destruction or replacement of other nations, many rebels sought refuge in these untouched areas, intensifying the dangers of the primitive forests and mountains.

In contrast, after Emperor Roselle initiated the Industrial Revolution, such challenges decreased in the Northern Continent. Currently, only a few remnants linger in the mountains of the south-central region.

The dossier offers no clues about April Fool's pranks or any Demon presence. Lumian, undeterred, set aside the dossier and turned his attention to something else.

He searched for keywords like "dream" and "festival."

Before his demise, Hisoka had mentioned the "Dream Festival."

Unfortunately, the patrol team had only been operational for six to seven years, with no recorded history of Tizamo Town's previous

issues. During this period, there were no instances of dream-related or festival-related problems in Tizamo Town.
Lumian wasn't disheartened. He placed the dossiers down and addressed Camus, "Can I make a copy of everything?"
"No problem." Camus knew Louis Berry was about to summon the Rabbit of Knowledge again.
At that moment, Reaza entered with another member of the patrol team, placing a small but weighty cloth bag in front of Lumian.
"Your bounty. Confirm it," Reaza said in Dutanese.
Lumian lifted the cloth bag and spilled its contents onto the table.
Banknotes from Intis and a considerable number of gold coins lay before him. Lumian counted them, confirming everything was in order.
After Reaza and the other patrol team member departed, Lumian turned to Camus and pushed the cloth bag over with a smile.
"You..." Camus's eyes widened, asking hesitantly.
Lumian responded with a grin, "As I said, I'll waive the official bounty."
"But I didn't..." Camus subconsciously replied, maintaining his politeness.
Lumian chuckled.
"The information you provided was crucial, but you need to share it with Kolobo.
"Also, do me a favor."
This sum of money is for information and compensation based on the dangers we faced... Camus pressed down on the cloth bag, asking, "What is it?"
"Help me find a few people born and raised in Tizamo Town who are currently living in Port Pylos. Also, locate a few who have visited Tizamo Town multiple times but have no connection to it. Bring them to my place one by one," Lumian requested.
Camus listened attentively and breathed a sigh of relief.
"No problem."
This matter was straightforward!
Upon his return to Hotel Orella, Lumian had barely set down the Rabbit of Knowledge's copied dossier in his room, ready to delve into its details, when the doorbell chimed.
Amidst the tinkling sounds, Lugano rushed to open the door.
Shortly after, he called out, "Boss, Monsieur Iveljsta wishes to meet you."
Iveljsta? The one residing on B18 with numerous Zombie servants, suspected to be a Wraith? He's here for me? Lumian raised his eyebrows, set aside the dossier, and exited the master bedroom.
...

Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.
In Franca and Jenna's rented apartment.
After seeing Anthony off, Franca returned to the master bedroom, contemplating the progress of digesting the Pleasure potion.
Even though Lumian's situation was unique, how could he digest the potion so quickly? How could he ascend to Sequence 5 in merely half a year? Despite this, Franca found herself triggered.
There lingered a sense of disappointment and frustration at being outpaced within seven months of watching over Lumian as an elder sister, or rather, an elder brother.
She longed to reach Sequence 5 and become a Demoness of Affliction at the earliest opportunity.
Truth be told, her digestion of the Pleasure potion surpassed that of most Demonesses. She had also gleaned substantial insights while delving into alternative interpretations and symbols of Pleasure. Patience was paramount, but blame fell upon the fellow with an absurdly rapid progression by her side!
Sigh, I must seek a partner for Pleasure. Both the ordinary and more profound forms of Pleasure are imperative. Only then can I digest it more rapidly. One is akin to my left foot, the other to my right--I must exert effort in both to move forward. I cannot jump on one foot alone... Franca's thoughts were lucid, yet she was uncertain how to proceed. Sigh, I cannot muster the courage to broach the subject... *Should I seek help from Browns and her companions?*
As Franca paced the room, she suddenly heard a knock on the bedroom door.
Jenna? Franca paused and turned towards the door.
"Enter, please."
Jenna, donned in a beige fluffy dress, stood before the door.
"Why the sudden politeness?" Franca inquired, feeling slightly uneasy.
Jenna chuckled in exasperation.
"Dammit! I've always been polite, okay? It's just that you never shut the door. You only close it when you sleep. How am I supposed to knock?"
With that remark, Jenna wore a vexed expression.
She regained composure and flashed a smile.
"Are you grappling with the Pleasure potion's digestion? Do you lack a target for its digestion?"
"Yes, but as I mentioned before..." Franca began to defend herself.
Jenna cut in, "What about me?"
"Huh?" Franca was caught off guard.
She questioned if she was imagining things.

Jenna's lovely face displayed a charming smile, reminiscent of her days as the Showy Diva, Little Minx.
She pushed aside strands of hair falling from her ears and grinned.
"Didn't you inform the Demoness of Black that we're lovers?
"Then why not turn to me for Pleasure potion digestion?"
"B-but..." Franca was bewildered. "Why are you doing this?"
Jenna approached Franca, maintaining her enticing smile.
"I want to experience pleasure. I'll become one in the future."
Surprise shifted to shock. Franca examined Jenna, wondering if she had undergone a sudden change.
Franca only snapped out of her reverie when Jenna halted in front of her, and a familiar fragrance filled her senses. She blurted out, "Are you trying to help me? Are you aiding me in this aspect because I've been without a partner for Pleasure digestion for so long?"
Jenna stopped and chuckled.
"That's one reason."
She gazed up at Franca's face and sincerely praised, "You're so beautiful..."
Franca fell silent for a moment before posing a serious question, "Do you like me?"
"I do," Jenna replied promptly. Her eyes glinted as she smiled and added, "You're so lively, interesting, and captivating. Why wouldn't I like you?"
Franca bit her red, moist lips.
"Then, do you love me? In a non-platonic sense."
Jenna fell silent.
She cast her gaze downward and pursed her lips.
"I don't want to deceive you. To me, you're a beacon of light that brightens my life, offering hope and warmth. You're the person I trust the most, my closest friend, and the perfect sister in my heart. However, I've never envisioned romantic love between us."
Franca's heart sank at the words "I don't want to deceive you," and an inexplicable ache surged within her.
A shiver ran down her spine.
She raised her right hand and shifted it slightly.
"Then, I can't..."
"Dammit! Why must you make things so complicated?" Jenna was already feeling bashful, embarrassed, and torn. She struggled to conceal it and convinced herself it was just an act. Upon hearing Franca's refusal, she finally erupted. "Can't we have sex without love? Are you truly a Demoness devoted solely to love?"
"I just feel..." Franca faltered. "I can handle others, but not you. I

can't bear the thought of you sacrificing yourself..."
Before she could finish, Jenna's tender lips pressed against hers, exploring and nibbling with an unpracticed finesse.
Franca couldn't resist, swept away by Jenna's lips and tongue, fueled by long-awaited anticipation, months of restraint, the lingering influence of Demon corruption, and the effects of the Pleasure potion.
She succumbed to it until Jenna pulled back, panting.
"Sacrifice, my foot! Quit playing innocent. Haven't you always joked about letting me experience true pleasure? Get with it!"
Jenna's cheeks flushed as she glared at Franca with moist eyes, resembling a fervent and assertive lion cub.
Franca suddenly felt that during Jenna's days in the market district as Little Minx, a small part of her personality might not have been an act but something she already possessed.
Jenna kissed her again, and Franca couldn't deny the allure.
As she relished the fragrant, sweet, and passionate pleasures, she couldn't shake off the realization that this was merely assistance, not love.
In that moment, a phrase echoed in her mind: In pain we find pleasure, in pleasure we drown.

Chapter 656: Choosing a Reward

Lumian once again encountered Monsieur Iveljsta, who resided in B18. He still wore a fluffy black hat adorned with a white feather and a complex black robe.

With a quick glance, Lumian had already covertly used Weakness Investigation to search for pale-white marks on Iveljsta's body, ready for potential assassinations and surprise attacks.

Aurore and Emperor Roselle had always emphasized the need to stay vigilant against others at all times!

Of course, Lumian felt that the two of them hadn't done a good job in this matter. Otherwise, they would still be active in the world.

At that moment, the pallor on Iveljsta's body concentrated on his dark-brown eyes, emitting an illusory quality that seemed unreal.

Does this mean he can quickly transform into a Wraith, and his eyes are no longer his weakness? As Lumian pondered, he gestured towards the divan in the living room.

"Let's chat there."

Ludwig, seated at the dining table, glanced at Iveljsta for a few seconds before lowering his head and continuing his meal with a succulent piece of beef.

Iveljsta nodded slightly and entered the living room quietly, taking a seat in a corner of the divan.

Are you a student at a primary school? So disciplined... Lumian criticized as he focused on observing Iverista's luck.

It was relatively normal and nothing special.

At that moment, Lumian suddenly had a few thoughts.

Luck Observation and Weakness Investigation require the eyes to determine the target's color. However, one focuses on the background color, while the other captures the various colors on the surface of the body. When I become a Fate Appropriator, could these two abilities fuse and mutate into a more special ability?

Why can I only use my eyes to observe these two abilities? Is a blind Reaper incapable of attacking a target's weakness? Similarly, is a blind Ascetic unqualified to observe others' luck? Can't they rely on their spirituality and ears and nose?

Or could it be done at a higher Sequence?

Lumian eased into the armchair, positioning himself at an angle across from Iveljsta. Flashing a friendly smile, he asked, "What's the matter?"

He spoke in Intisian.

Iveljsta, as silent as a corpse, straightened up. His eyes, deep as he spoke in ancient Feysac.

"Allow me to introduce myself. Iveljsta Eggers, a member of the

Rose School of Thought and temperance faction under the Church of The Fool."
Lumian's nerves, already tense, heightened. Nevertheless, he maintained a relaxed demeanor, confirming, "Are you Twanaku's liaison?"
He switched to ancient Feysac.
"No," Iveljsta shook his head, "I've already eliminated that member fifteen minutes ago."
Fifteen minutes ago, when I was still with the patrol team... However, you can't expect me to believe you just because you say so... Lumian feigned curiosity and asked, "I recall that you arrived in Port Pylos before Twanaku was exposed. What was your original motive?"
"I'm investigating the primitive forest in this area. I'm still in the early stages of gathering more information," Iveljsta replied seriously. "Four days ago, I came into contact with Twanaku and obtained some information from him. He seemed fine and was very restrained."
He's indeed restrained. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a second serial murder case in Port Pylos only after four years... Going to the primitive forest to investigate... The primitive forest... On the surface, the incident in Tizamo Town was a sudden attack by a tribe in the primitive forest. Lumian quickly made many connections and said to Iveljsta thoughtfully, "Twanaku once did something in Tizamo Town that involved the tribes in the nearby primitive forest. Some of his important items seem to be hidden in Tizamo Town. It might also be related to a Nois family Demon of unknown Sequence."
Iveljsta listened in silence, lost in thought.
After a few seconds, he said to Lumian, "Thank you for providing this information. It might not be useful for my investigation, but it can let me know what to be wary of."
He didn't specify his mission. Clearly, he needed his superior's permission.
Lumian responded nonchalantly, "Even if I don't tell you now, you'll find out tonight or tomorrow."
Having already reported the matter to Madam Magician, the Major Arcana card holder would undoubtedly inform the Church of The Fool and the temperance faction in detail subsequently. It wouldn't only be a general outline that mentioned key personnel like before.
Iveljsta nodded with restraint and said, "I'm here to express my gratitude and to inform you that we're already investigating any potential problems and latent dangers.
"Also, if you need help in Matani, feel free to come to me."

"Alright." Lumian didn't stand on ceremony.
After delving into the more serious matters, Lumian, intrigued, asked Iveljsta, "Why did you add the Rose School of Thought prefix when you introduced yourself? You've already left the Rose School of Thought and joined the Church of The Fool. It sounds as if the Rose School of Thought is affiliated with the Church of The Fool."
"Our leader specifically requested this. She always believes that we are the true orthodox branch of the Rose School of Thought. Only we represent the Rose School of Thought. Those traitors should change the organization's name, not us," Iveljsta explained in detail.
Sounds quite stubborn... Aren't you from the temperance faction? Don't you restrain your emotions and desires in this aspect? Yes, Sequence 5 is Wraith, close to evil spirits, and evil spirits have an extreme side. Is this reflected in High-Sequence Beyonders of the temperance faction's corresponding pathway? Lumian didn't quite understand and tried to make a guess based on the available information.
He was just chatting and had no intention of inquiring further. Instead, he asked,
"Your last name is Eggers. Was your ancestor a member of the Balam Empire's royal family?"
"Yes," Iveljsta replied proudly, his emotions held in check. "And my mother's lineage is noble from the Highlands Kingdom."
For many in the Southern Continent, the surname Eggers bore unparalleled prestige. It was a symbol of a deity who had once trod the land, a representation of Death's dominion over the world.
But Lumian's curiosity wandered elsewhere.
"I've heard that the mausoleums of the Balam Empire's nobles are constructed upside down underground, much like this hotel. What mystical significance does that hold? Is it simply a way to confront death? And why is death associated with the underground? Shouldn't the Underworld exist in the spirit world?"
This was the question that piqued Lumian's interest upon learning about the matter.
His understanding of mysticism was limited.
Iveljsta pondered for a moment and then explained, "I didn't choose the Death pathway. The construction method originated from ancient times, passed down by all the Eggers ancestors, devoted to the deity who controlled death.
"He embodies the very concept of death. Emulating Him is a way to approach the source of death.
"This mystic explanation resonates with me the most. Over the years, I've heard various interpretations:

"Some see life and death as opposing mystical concepts. They argue that, just as we stand upright and grow upwards in life, burial upside down signifies the contradiction and connection between life and death.
"Others believe that true hell isn't in the spirit world or the Underworld, but deep underground. Descending further symbolizes reaching true hell and returning to the essence of death. Thus, mausoleums are built upside down, reflecting our intention to face hell, worship death, and return to the source. This is the essence and symbol of mysticism."
Some Beyonders of the Death pathway don't really approve of the Underworld... *Can you discover true hell by delving deep underground?* Heh heh, hasn't anyone informed you that the world we're on is essentially a planet? Does this extension reach underground magma and the core? Do they believe that's the genuine hell? Going deeper will traverse the core and the magma, but that'll merely be the other side of the planet, let alone true hell... Lumian found himself increasingly entertained as he listened.
Suddenly, he was taken aback.
What exists on the opposite side of the planet?
I only know of the Northern and Southern Continents. Considering the time difference, they're nearly on the same side...
If this world is genuinely a planet, there must be another side. But I've never heard of any continents—just an expansive sea?
Wait, how did those giant fellows from the New City of Silver emerge from the Forsaken Land of the Gods... Something must have occurred on the continent on the other side of the planet, abandoned by the deities. Could that be why it's known as the Forsaken Land of the Gods?
If I have a chance in the future, I could revisit the New City of Silver and explore the library for books related to the Forsaken Land of the Gods...
Lumian reined in his thoughts and continued conversing with Iveljsta for a while. Eventually, he escorted the former descendant of the Balam Empire's royal family, a member of the temperance faction, away from this floor.
Not long after returning to his room, the doll messenger arrived with a response from Madam Magician.
"The information and insights you've gathered this time are exceptionally valuable. It's no wonder my spiritual perception guided me to let you visit the New City of Silver after the Hanth Island Demon incident.
"Reflecting on it, your encounter with Naboredisley seemed almost

coincidental. You followed the clues to Hanth Island. Hmm, you should grasp the significance, right?
"The situation in this matter both reassures me and intensifies my vigilance and anxiety. When that entity stands by our side, these details are incredibly useful. However, He won't always be with us. When our objectives clash, I can't fathom what challenges we'll face. The same goes for you and me.
"Therefore, Hunters must rely more on their personal growth amidst blood, fire, chaos, and conflict. Many Hunters meet their end, using their bones to forge the Red Priest who conquers all.
"We've already initiated an internal review. It involves a considerable number of individuals and will take a substantial amount of time to complete. Considering your contributions, besides converting the Beyonder characteristic into a Sealed Artifact, you have the option to choose a reward. Pick one out of two. Here are your choices.
"1: the potion formula for the Hunter pathway's Sequence 4 Iron-blooded Knight. 2: I'll assist you in divining clues about the remaining parts of the Abscessed Hand's body."

Chapter 657: Tizamo Town

Reading Madam Magician's two choices, Lumian fell into deep thought.

These were incredible rewards!

It had to be known that reaching Sequence 4 marked a crucial point for Beyonders, a moment of qualitative transformation. From then on, one could attain godhood and become a half-human, half-god entity. Most Beyonders would never get this far. This wasn't just about becoming a demigod; it also included seeing or obtaining related items firsthand.

A Sequence 4 potion formula was usually priceless!

Moreover, this was a Sequence 4 potion formula related to Lumian's own pathway.

As for the reward of divining clues about the rest of the Abscessed Hand's body, it symbolized the promise and assistance of an Angel. Ordinary Beyonders wouldn't even dream of such a chance, let alone receive an opportunity. They could only read about Angels gaining the Lord's permission and responding to believers' prayers in various Churches.

Furthermore, Lumian needed to address this issue.

After advancing to a Sequence 5 Reaper, his top priority was finding the remaining parts of the Abscessed Hand's body. Without completing this task, the formula, the ingredients, the digestion process, and the prepared ritual wouldn't give him a shot at becoming a demigod in time due to the unfulfilled promise and the oath's restrictions. Regret wouldn't even be an option.

Lumian had no clue how to locate it by himself. His only plan was to mimic the incantation for summoning the Abscessed Hand and craft a new series of summoning incantations. He hoped to summon the spirit world creature's legs, arms, body, and head.

However, this was a risky endeavor. In his dream, Lumian learned from his sister that when the summoning incantation lacked clarity and had no restrictions, the summoned entity could be unpredictable. It might be a demigod-level spirit world creature filled with malice, capable of killing the summoner instantly.

Lumian couldn't pinpoint the precise direction due to the unknown fragmentation of the Abscessed Hand's body. It could be a relatively intact body missing a hand, or it might have shattered into tiny, peanut-sized fragments. Describing it accurately was impossible. He could only experiment repeatedly, narrowing down the possibilities. It was akin to playing with his life.

More importantly, Lumian had already combed through the comprehensive information on common spirit world creatures

provided by Madam Magician. Still, he found nothing that seemed to be other parts of the Abscessed Hand's body.
Lumian desired the Sequence 4 Iron-blooded Knight potion formula and clues about the rest of the Abscessed Hand's body.
This was the reason why he couldn't make a decision.
He pondered whether to teleport back to Trier now and seek Franca or Jenna's help in divination, hoping their spiritual insights would provide him with valuable hints.
As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian reached a decision.
The second option!
This was because he remembered something important. Mr. Hanged Man's reward had yet to materialize. It was an opportunity to explore the Blue Avenger, a ghost ship that was a relic of the Tudor Empire.
Considering that the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor was once a true god of the Hunter pathway and a half-mad Red Priest, the Tudor Empire's inheritance contained the Sequence 4 potion formula of the Hunter pathway, along with Beyonder ingredients and characteristics. It was something to look forward to.
Lumian promptly sat down and penned a reply to Madam Magician, expressing his thoughts. He also informed her that he would be heading to Tizamo Town to investigate Hisoka's inheritance.
...
At 4 p.m., Camus Castiya, accompanied by three dark-brown Southern Continent natives, knocked on the door of Suite 7 on B3 of Hotel Orella.
"They all hail from Tizamo, born and bred. They only ventured to Port Pylos in search of opportunities upon reaching adulthood," Camus explained in Intisian, introducing the two men and one woman. "One is a supplier of Gwadar berries, another married a local and toils at the port, and the third took a less lawful path as a thief."
One is a relatively wealthy merchant, the other is a dockworker, and the other is a thief. They happen to be at three different social levels, and they are from both genders. This will allow me to understand the situation in Tizamo to the greatest extent and comprehensively. Camus is very professional in this aspect. As expected of a former Public Security Officer... Lumian nodded slightly and asked the three subjects in fluent Dutanese, "I'm a scholar of folklore en route to Tizamo. But before that, I'd like to learn more about the town. My Dutanese is a bit rusty, so Mr. Camus will assist in translation."

"We'll heed Officer Camus," responded the eldest merchant with a smile, quickly seconded by the others.
Lumian turned to Lugano and instructed, "I'll take one to the master bedroom for an exchange. You can entertain the other two."
"Alright," Lugano replied promptly.
Inside the master bedroom, Lumian courteously seated the merchant in an armchair, positioning himself at the edge of the bed. Speaking in Intisian, he inquired, "What's the primary produce of Tizamo?"
Camus, translating, wore a puzzled expression.
Is Louis Berry truly planning a journey to Tizamo?
It's evident he's tracing Twanaku's footsteps!
Camus assumed the role of an Interrogator, staring down at the seated merchant as he conveyed Lumian's words.
The merchant, filled with trepidation, responded, "Sir, we mainly cultivate Gwadar berries, spices, and forest fruits. Numerous plantations dot the surroundings, and we often venture into the forest for hunting, selling both meat and fur. Additionally, we cut down trees for crafting coffins.
"That's... that's about it. The remaining effort goes into planting corn and potatoes for our own consumption."
Lumian absorbed the information and refined his understanding of Dutanese through Camus's translation.
Engaging in casual conversation, Lumian explored the daily lives, sustenance, and leisure activities of the Tizamo residents.
From the merchant's account, Lumian painted a mental picture of Tizamo.
Its populace mainly consisted of locals, with outsiders being the proprietors of nearby plantations and some acquired slaves. Thanks to the hunting services provided to the Port Pylos gentry, Tizamo maintained a connection with the outside world, avoiding isolation and conservativism.
Although the faith in Death had been eradicated, traces of it lingered in daily life. The townspeople primarily believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun, yet remnants of Death faith were evident, such as frequent visits to the cemetery and the practice of not burying prematurely deceased children in coffins. Each adult prepared a coffin for themselves in advance, and the common means of travel involved using a coffin.
With keen interest, Lumian concluded the discussion and inquired, "Are you familiar with Twanaku Tupián?"
Finally getting into the meat... Camus exhaled quietly and conveyed the question to the merchant.

A warm smile appeared on the merchant's face.
"I do! He's well-known in town."
"Why?" Camus interjected.
The merchant, with an obsequious smile, responded, "Sir, he should be your colleague. Twanaku is the first person from Tizamo to join the patrol team. Moreover, he's rapidly advancing in rank. He's a source of pride for us."
Lumian couldn't help but emit a soft chuckle.
"I'm quite curious about Twanaku's past."
The merchant's expression shifted slightly as he glanced around.
"Sirs, did Twanaku commit a crime? Did he join an organization that believes in Death?"
Quite perceptive... Lumian thought, while Camus grumbled in a low voice, "Are we doing the questioning or are you? Just answer truthfully!"
Under the mental pressure of the Interrogator, the dark-skinned merchant replied with a trembling voice, "I've known for a long time that this young man, Twanaku, will surely become extraordinary, but I also know he'll one day tread the path of blasphemy against a deity."
Seeing Camus and Lumian awaiting further explanation, the merchant continued, "There was a fire in the Twanaku family. All his kin perished, and only he survived. According to our customs, he's favored by a deity, spared from death. Such individuals often go on to achieve great feats."
The deity's favor refers to Death here, right? Not succumbing to Death is considered receiving Death's favor? Lumian interjected thoughtfully.
"The fire happened about six years ago?"
"How did you know?" the surprised merchant asked. Then, slapping his forehead, he added, "I'm such a fool. You must have investigated it beforehand."
From the looks of it, the fire somehow brought Twanaku back to life, transforming him into Hisoka... Lumian nodded.
"Continue."
Recalling, the merchant said, "Since then, Twanaku fell silent, as if in shock. He no longer participated in Mass or entered the cathedral of God. Later, he left Tizamo for Port Pylos."
Was Twanaku unafraid of scrutiny for acting so unusually? Did he not bother to feign his faith? By then, Hisoka had already become a Beyonder of the Devil pathway, making it impossible for him to participate in the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Mass? Where did his first potion come from? Lumian pondered while Camus translated and asked, "Does Twanaku frequently return to

Tizamo?"
"He comes back to Tizamo every year. I'm not sure how often or for how long," the merchant truthfully replied.
"Where does he stay when he returns to Tizamo?" Lumian inquired further.
The merchant smoothly replied, "At his own place. After joining the patrol team and amassing wealth, he rebuilt the burnt-down house."
Rebuilt the house that was destroyed in the fire... Lumian contemplated for a moment and then asked, "Are there any special folklore festivals in Tizamo?"

Chapter 658: Deep Desire

The merchant responded cautiously to Camus's translation, "Sir, we don't really have any special folklore festivals. We only celebrate two festivals every year. One is the Sun Sacrifice in December, and the other is the New Sun Festival in June."

The Sun Sacrifice was a recurring festival for the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, marking the day with the longest daylight of the year when the sun reached its zenith at noon.

In the Northern Continent, it took place in mid-to-late June, while in the Southern Continent, due to the reversed seasons, it occurred in mid-to-late December.

The New Sun Festival, originating from the believers of the Southern Continent's Eternal Blazing Sun, involved celebrations during the longest night and shortest days, welcoming the return of the sun and anticipating more light and warmer weather.

This celebration often coincided with the New Year in many parts of the Southern Continent, gradually merging the two festivities.

The merchant explained that the citizens of Tizamo Town solely celebrated festivals connected to the Eternal Blazing Sun, having abandoned the traditions related to Death.

He reflected for a moment and added, "It's been like this for a long time—since my grandfather was born."

Matani, particularly Port Pylos and the gold mine city of Devise, had been Intis's colony for nearly a century. The native population was compelled to convert generations ago, becoming followers of the Eternal Blazing Sun. This, however, was limited to areas effectively managed by colonial institutions in the past.

When Lumian arrived in Port Pylos, his first impression was: at the docks, in the heart of the city, it resembled the port cities of Intis. Yet, the workers' skin was darker and browner. The streets frequented by Intisians and Feynapotterians were sparsely populated and desolate. After passing Hotel Orella and exploring other areas of Port Pylos, various buildings with West Balam characteristics emerged. More pedestrians populated the streets, and the echoes of Dutanese filled the air.

Lumian sought further details, indirectly confirming the merchant's words. Interrogator Camus discerned no signs of deception.

"What things have left a deep impression on you since you were young that you still remember from time to time?" Lumian shifted the conversation.

Recalling, the merchant replied, "Grand funerals... Newly built coffins...

"The primitive tribe that clashes with us every year... The occasional scream at night because of them...
"Everyone's hardworking, calm, and well-educated. We get angry, but we don't argue on the spot or shout. We choose to find the padre, officers, and judges to determine who's right and who's wrong..."
Camus translated the merchant's words to Lumian, adding a few comments.
"That's indeed the case. I've been to Tizamo. The people there are very docile. Even if they're treated unfairly, they rarely resist violently. The manor owners of the surrounding plantations love to hire them, reducing the cost of buying slaves.
"Of course, it's not that they're emotionless and won't resist. Instead, they tend to abide by order and follow the official processes to resolve problems. I-I guess they can be considered outstanding believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun?"
The honorific name of the Eternal Blazing Sun contained the description "Embodiment of Order."
As a member of the Feynapotter royal lineage, Camus undoubtedly believed in the Earth Mother. He knew that Louis Berry hailed from the Intis Republic and was likely a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun.
Lumian stood up, extending his arms with a smile. "Praise the Sun!"
"Praise the Sun!" The merchant hastily followed suit.
Lumian settled back into his seat, contemplating for a few fleeting moments.
"Have you experienced any strange dreams?"
The merchant nodded, then shook his head.
"Many, but they slip away from memory. Do you not encounter such dreams?"
Indeed. Dreams often elude the control of one's consciousness. They can reveal spiritual insights, mirror suppressed desires, or reflect events from the day. Sometimes, these elements intertwine, resulting in strange and unpredictable dreams. I, too, frequently encounter such dreams. In the past, when I battled the Demon corruption, they were even more bizarre and exaggerated...
Lumian sensed that the merchant's response was impeccable.
If the other party could pinpoint a specific strange dream, that might raise suspicion.
Either the dream was exceptionally strange and unforgettable, or the merchant was abnormal and had prepared in advance before coming.
After discussing other matters, Lumian escorted the merchant out

of the master bedroom.
The responses of the other two Tizamons were similar to the merchant's, only supplementing the details they observed at their level and sharing encounters with their own characteristics.
Lumian found no traces of the Dream Festival.
If the Dream Festival is genuinely linked to Tizamo, there's only one possibility: When the townsfolk fall asleep, they enter a dream world to celebrate the festival. Upon waking, they forget everything...
Or, there's another possibility. Two factions may be involved in Hisoka's Tizamo Town prank. First, the citizens of Tizamo. Second, the primitive tribe in the nearby forest. Could the Dream Festival be a celebration for that primitive tribe?
Hisoka's prank impacted the Dream Festival, leading the primitive tribe to suddenly attack Tizamo, resulting in significant casualties and concealing the traces of his advancement ritual to Desire Apostle. Lumian pondered as he walked Camus and the three Tizamons to the door.
Upon returning to the master bedroom, he stood before the desk and gazed at the stone wall in front of him. His eyes flickered with anticipation and unease.
His decision to stay in the Southern Continent and actively pursue Hisoka's inheritance was indeed to grow amid blood, fire, chaos, and conflict, securing more acting opportunities. He aimed to open the door to godhood and advance to Sequence 4 as soon as possible.
The reason for his impatience was: he saw a glimmer of hope in reviving his sister!
The state of the Naboredisleys on Hanth Island provided him with that glimmer of hope.
This hope stemmed from the belief that a high-ranking figure of the Earth Mother Church might possess the ability to divide another person's soul. This would allow each soul fragment to grow into a relatively separate individual through rebirth.
Aurore's soul fragment was sealed within Lumian's body.
Perhaps a high-ranking member of the Church of Earth Mother could use one or more soul fragments to resurrect Aurore in a new form!
Lumian wasn't certain if such a plan could be realized or if it constituted true "resurrection," but it was the most plausible method he had encountered so far. He was determined to give it a try.
Of course, he couldn't experiment with Aurore's soul fragment directly. His plan was to deliberately create some soul fragments in future cullings and seek help from the Church of Earth Mother

to see if they could be reborn and if the person who returned was the same individual.
Once all the details were confirmed, he would revive Aurore.
Lumian didn't believe he had the qualifications to collaborate with the Church of Earth Mother. Only by becoming a demigod and relying on the secret organization, the Tarot Club, could he gain the Church of Earth Mother's attention and fulfill the transaction conditions proposed by the other party.
For this, Lumian couldn't wait to obtain godhood and advance to Sequence 4.
At times, Lumian wished his sister were also a Blessed of Celestial Worthy and had inherited the ancient castle. This way, her resurrection might be more straightforward.
Yes, to extract Aurore's soul fragment, I must undo Mr. Fool's seal. To undo his seal, I have to wait for Termiboros to become very weak. For Termiboros to weaken, I need to continuously extract his power at a higher level. And to withstand the power of a higher level, I have to possess godhood and advance step by step...
Lumian's thoughts gradually clarified, and he unprecedentedly yearned for an advancement.
...
Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.
Franca lay on the bed beneath a velvet blanket, her cheeks still flushed, eyes moist, and her expression unusually complicated.
Beside her, Jenna rested under the same velvet cover. She had slipped into a deep slumber, her brows furrowed with a mix of exhaustion, satisfaction, resistance, and nostalgia. Her outstretched arms and exposed fair skin still bore traces of the recent fervor.
Franca gazed at Jenna and let out a sudden sigh.
The experience had exceeded her expectations, yet a sense of emptiness lingered in her heart.
It was beautiful in the moment, but what would transpire after the digestion of the Pleasure potion?
Could physical intimacy and emotional distance coexist?
Did overwhelming pleasure pave the way for sorrow? Was it the agony of sinking into oblivion while resisting salvation?
Sigh... Franca released another soft sigh.
She sensed that her Pleasure potion had been substantially digested.
...
Matani State, Port Pylos.
Lumian, sipping a glass of Gwadar, looked up and spoke to Lugano

as if discussing the weather.
"We're heading to Tizamo Town today. Will you join Ludwig and me, or will you stay here and wait for us?
"Let me warn you in advance. The situation in Tizamo Town might be very dangerous."
Very dangerous... He wanted to say he'd stay in Port Pylos, but memories of Father Montserrat flashed in his mind.
Gritting his teeth, he replied, "I'm with you."
If danger lurked in Tizamo Town, he could rely on his boss to bail him out. But here? Only himself!
Lumian nodded slightly and didn't say more.
After checking out and hitting the street, he chuckled at Lugano and Ludwig, "Do we take a coffin to Tizamo, or should we grab a carriage?"
Before Lugano and Ludwig could answer, a four-wheeled, four-seater carriage rolled up from under the shade.
The carriage's driver, a young man, kept his head low, not daring to look away.
Coming to a stop, Camus Castiya emerged. He forced a smile and said to Lumian, "Thanks for your help these past days. I'll escort you to Tizamo."

Chapter 659: Poor "Monster"

Observing Camus's expression, as if compelled to act at gunpoint, Lumian didn't hold back. He replied with a smile, "I'd like that."

It was evident to him that the brass of the patrol team, or even Admiral Querarill himself, was concerned about Louis Berry wandering around their territory. Tizamo, where he was headed, was located near the primitive forest and had close ties to a Sequence 5 Desire Apostle. Therefore, two additional patrol team members with a certain relationship with Louis Berry were sent to accompany him. Even if they couldn't prevent trouble, they could at least send word before it became a catastrophe.

As for why they didn't directly stop Louis Berry from heading to Tizamo Town, it was partly because Lumian had hinted at the faction backing him when he submitted Twanaku's head. Without a conflict of principles, Admiral Querarill likely wouldn't make things difficult for him. Secondly, Louis Berry's investigations and adventures seemed to bring calamity, but they had exposed hidden dangers ahead of time. If the problem remained concealed and continued to evolve, Matani and Admiral Querarill might not be able to handle it in a year or two. When the time came, blood might flow like a river.

Kolobo, acting as the carriage driver, gazed ahead stonily. He fumbled for a pair of sunglasses and slid them onto the bridge of his nose. There were no visible injuries on his body.

As Camus held the carriage door open, he watched Louis Berry board, leading a young boy by the hand.

"He's going to Tizamo too?" Camus blurted in surprise.

He had assumed Louis Berry would leave his servant and godson at Hotel Orella, joining them later after dealing with Tizamo Town's issues. However, the adventurer was now bringing a young child to Tizamo, and it was evident this wasn't a leisurely trip. It was very dangerous!

Lumian's left foot remained on the ground, and his right foot halted at the carriage's edge. He smiled and spoke, "My godson is fascinated by jungle fruits, the unique beasts I hunt, and various spices."

Earlier, the Tizamons had mentioned their hometown's specialties, highlighting the excellence of roasted meat. The blend of spices and the distinctive gamey flavor of wild beasts in the forest contributed to Tizamo Town's unique delicacies.

Ludwig, already settled in the carriage, swallowed, seemingly in sync with Lumian.

Aren't you worried about endangering your godson? *Why are you*

so confident? Camus didn't press, simply signaling Lugano with his eyes to hurry up.
Lugano cast a glance at the peculiar carriage driver, who trembled slightly beneath his black sunglasses. He entered the carriage and took a seat across from Lumian and Ludwig.
Camus shut the carriage door and settled beside Kolobo. With a sigh, he remarked, "You can remove your sunglasses now. It's been hard on you."
"Alright, alright, alright." Kolobo seemed to shiver as if struck by an icy wind. His teeth chattered, and his tremors intensified.
Camus turned to him, surprised.
"Didn't you strike a deal face-to-face with Louis Berry? Why are you still so afraid?"
Not seeing him directly again!
"Alright, alright, alright." Kolobo removed his sunglasses, taking more than ten seconds to compose himself.
In a hushed tone, he confessed with fear, "I feel like my fingers, my arms, my insides, even my head... all eaten.
"That, that..."
"That what?" Camus struggled to comprehend why the Monster's demeanor had shifted so drastically, sensing that the issue might be significant.
Kolobo swallowed hard and continued, "That... that child... is also... very dangerous!
"Though I haven't laid eyes on him, I sense a looming threat, like facing a lion, a tiger, a python, ready to eat me at any moment."
"..." Camus was stunned, a hiss escaping his lips.
Until now, Kolobo had never exhibited such fear except in the presence of three individuals radiating danger: Desire Apostle Twanaku with Wraith powers, and Louis Berry, capable of hunting Twanaku. *Could this boy match them?*
Is he also a Beyonder, perhaps a Sequence 5 Beyonder?
No, it's not merely a Sequence 5 matter. Our patrol team's captain is a Sequence 5, yet Kolobo never mentioned feeling such foreboding in his presence.
There must be something unique about these three individuals!
Regardless, the boy is undoubtedly extraordinary and hazardous!
No wonder Louis Berry is bringing his godson to Tizamo without worry. Perhaps the child poses an even greater threat... Camus unraveled his earlier confusion, stifling his curiosity, refraining from probing further with Kolobo.
In the confines of the four-wheeled carriage, even with the barrier between them, Louis Berry caught wind of their hushed exchange!
Considering the intel gleaned from the Fog Sea, Camus harbored

suspicions that Louis Berry was a Sequence 5 Beyonder following the Hunter pathway. Those of this pathway were renowned for their sharp senses—exceptional vision, acute sense of smell, and keen hearing.
A Beyonder of the Monster pathway is quite intriguing. Even without laying eyes on Ludwig or hearing his voice, Louis can sense his ominous aura, a being who devours everything... Lumian, leaning against the carriage wall, toyed with his golden straw hat, shooting Ludwig a knowing smile.
Could it be that this "little child" has truly taken a liking to Kolobo and Camus?
Indeed. These are two Beyonders who haven't succumbed to severe corruption. Ludwig likely had a momentary lapse in control... Heh heh, Camus may not have noticed, but Kolobo reacted instantly, sensing the danger? Lumian acknowledged Ludwig with a nod.
"Well done. Your restraint is admirable."
Praise was due when a child behaved correctly, fostering a healthy mindset and habits!
Ludwig remained silent, his expression conveying he was not to be treated as a child.
A faint smile graced his lips as he retrieved a box of biscuits from his crimson school bag, nibbling on them.
What restraint... What did he mean by "well done"... Lugano, seated across from him, found himself perplexed.
Tizamo stood as the most remote town in Port Pylos, nestled against the edge of the primitive forest. A full two hours' journey by carriage was required to reach it.
Of course, for those in a hurry, an alternative route existed: boarding a steam locomotive from the port to Cahert, the southernmost town. From there, a carriage or coffin could be hired to venture northeast, shaving the travel time to Tizamo down to just an hour. However, Lumian showed no inclination towards haste.
As they departed Port Pylos, the road gradually narrowed and deteriorated. Yet, the carriage pressed on steadily. Kolobo, the carriage driver, operated with precision akin to a well-
oiled machine, guiding the horses and carriage without falter.
An hour slipped by, and the carriage wound its way through the forest.
Abruptly, Lumian, pretending to slumber, snapped open his eyes.
His body turned dark and spectral, melding with the shadows cast by the window.
Shadow Transformation!
In an instant, gunshots pierced the forest's tranquility.

Bullets whizzed from afar, some thudding into the earth, kicking up clouds of soil, while others took aim at Camus, the carriage, and the horse.
Amidst the chaos, the horse crumpled, bleeding profusely, and the carriage toppled to the ground.
Kolobo had already abandoned his perch as the driver, escaping unscathed from the barrage of gunfire. Camus leaped clear of the carriage in advance, crouching low, revolver in hand. He maneuvered with agility, at times rolling, at others slithering deeper into the undergrowth.
With each movement, he unleashed shots, seeking to suppress the unseen assailant. In this range, many of his abilities were restricted.
A handful of fiery crimson orbs, almost blindingly white, streaked past Camus, disappearing into the forest's depths.
Rumble!
Amidst the thunderous explosions, the gunfire abruptly ceased.
Soon after, curses in Dutanese rang out from the forest's depths.
"Go to hell, you Northern Continent bandits!
"Rot with your sons of bitches!
"Come after us if you have the guts!
"..."
Gradually, the curses faded into the forest's depths.
Lumian emerged from the shadows of the carriage, opting not to pursue.
"It's the Resistance! What are they doing in Matani..." Camus frowned, muttering to himself in confusion.
In the Southern Continent, numerous Resistance factions abounded. He couldn't discern which faction they belonged to or their motives. Typically, Matani, ostensibly independent from the Intis Republic and governed by Admiral Querarill, a Southern Continent native, saw little Resistance activity. Their primary demand was the expulsion of colonists.
Could it be a faction of the Resistance dedicated to Death, aiming to revive Death's influence in Matani? Please not the Rose School of Thought-backed Resistance. No, those lunatics... Camus returned to the carriage, puzzled.
Lumian mulled over another matter.
Despite attaining Sequence 5 status, life still felt fragile.
Vulnerable to being shot dead!
If a Resistance member possessed sharpshooting skills and remained beyond his observational range, sniping from over 100 meters, they could have ended his life.
Reapers lacked the resilient bodies of Devils. While lacking

Malicious Perception, Devils might sustain only minor wounds from rifle shots. Their absence of long-range Danger Premonition characteristic of Seer pathways rendered them unable to preemptively evade.

Granted, Lumian's Ascetic traits bolstered his spiritual perception. Anticipating danger, he had foreseen the attack.

Yet, if the adversary could nullify his spiritual perception or manipulate it effectively, conventional rifles could indeed imperil Lumian.

Yes, Shadow Transformation can serve as a shield. Bullets lacking special effects pose no genuine threat to shadow beings... Lumian redirected his thoughts, instructing Lugano, emerging from the carriage, "Check on the horse."

If it survived, attend to its injuries promptly for carriage duty. If not, Ludwig would command the equine corpse to pull the carriage.

After all, Ludwig had gained the ability to command a handful of low-level undead from a concoction brewed from Hisoka's eyeballs.

Chapter 660: Across the Door

Without hesitation, Lugano pushed himself up and hurried to the fallen horse, carefully examining it.

After a few seconds, he exclaimed regretfully, "It's dead!"

The poor horse was unlucky. Despite being over a hundred meters away, it was hit twice by a flurry of gunshots. One bullet struck its side, and the other hit its head. It couldn't be any more dead.

In contrast, the carriage driver remained unscathed. At most, he had scraped his skin during the tumble.

Lumian glanced at Kolobo, who had his back turned to him and the others, seemingly on guard against any potential attacks from the depths of the forest. He led Ludwig, who had been thrown from the carriage, to the side of the motionless, bleeding horse corpse.

"Stop the bleeding," Lumian instructed Lugano.

Why stop it when the horse is already dead? Although Lugano didn't understand, he extended his shimmering palm.

After the dead horse's wounds closed, Lumian turned to Ludwig and said, "Your turn."

Ludwig, dressed in a child's formal attire, nodded slightly.

He extended his right palm, gripping the dead horse with his five fingers, and slowly raised it.

The blood-stained corpse of the horse suddenly stood up, causing the overturned carriage to shift slightly.

Upon seeing this, Camus gave a barely perceptible nod.

Is this child from the Death pathway or the Prisoner pathway?

However, there's no cold aura or corpse-like aura...

After Lugano righted the carriage, the undead horse corpse continued pulling the five of them towards Tizamo.

Just before noon, Lumian spotted their destination.

It was a small town half-encircled by rubber trees, acacia trees, laurels, and other vegetation. Several plantations dotted the muddy road, and the air was filled with different spice scents and the alluring smell of roasted meat.

Tizamo's buildings were unique. Apart from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church cathedral, which had a distinct northern style, the rest were propped up by wooden stakes and stone pillars. They were reminiscent of West Balam—the base deliberately left empty underneath.

This was due to the humid air and abundant rainfall in many West Balam areas. Water would often overflow and pool below.

Lumian climbed down from the four-wheeled, four-seater carriage, watching the people busy with their tasks in the plantation and the town.

...
Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.
Franca reclined in the recliner, rocking gently as she recollected the previous day's events.
After Jenna woke up that morning, she went out to the streets to buy meat, vegetables, fruits, and bread, making Franca wonder if she had experienced a wet dream or hallucination.
Why did she suddenly volunteer to help me with digesting the potion? Compared to most Trieriens, she can definitely be considered conservative...
Moreover, she was so direct and straightforward that I almost lost my desires out of shock. Shouldn't she flirt first to set the mood? When the time comes, even if she doesn't initiate, I won't be able to control myself... The more Franca thought about it, the more puzzled she became. She felt Jenna wouldn't normally act that way.
After recalling Jenna's past experiences and actions, she realized there was no issue.
That was precisely what Jenna would do!
Jenna has a bold nature, or rather, a personality that allows her to act decisively...
After the Showy Diva singer who helped her was raped by Margot and became unstable, she was truly willing to go to extremes to assassinate Margot and avenge her friend. To that end, she even indebted herself to me for the Assassin potion and firmly became a Beyonder despite her finances...
At the Hugues Artois banquet, she faced the Member of Parliament protected by official Beyonders and evil gods' minions. She risked everything, disregarding her own fate. She killed the bastard who brought catastrophe to the market district and her family on the spot...
In her heart, I should still be more important than that Showy Diva friend of hers. Suddenly going to extremes and offering to help me with the potion's effects is indeed something she would do...
Besides, sigh, this definitely isn't a spur-of-the-moment idea. She has asked me several times about my progress digesting the Pleasure potion and if I have a new partner. She even recommended Lumian...
Realizing that I haven't found a new partner and that I'm only open-minded outwardly, she decided to act after being stirred by Lumian advancing to Sequence 5 yesterday...
That doesn't seem enough reason—Jenna wouldn't sacrifice her

body because of just those things. Sigh, sacrifice...
Could it be that she had long realized I secretly liked her and didn't seek out a new partner because of her? Could she believe she affected my digesting the Pleasure potion, causing her to act?
Yes! That must be it. That's the only way she'd truly go to such extremes.
Ahhh! *Why can't I find any hint of romantic love?*
Franca wailed inwardly.
If she had known this would happen, she would have summoned her courage, toughened her resolve, and sought Lumian's help. That way, she wouldn't feel as conflicted and pained as she did now.
Of course, she didn't seek out a new intimate partner partly because she cared about Jenna's opinion.
She had become Gardner Martin's lover and shared his other lovers before meeting Jenna. There was no changing that history, so she continued on.
After Gardner Martin's demise, she had claimed she wanted Browns to experience true pleasure and participate in the Demoness's female orgies, but most of it was just talk. She was filled with anticipation only out of novelty. If Browns suddenly agreed, she might hesitate and make excuses.
She didn't want to leave an unrestrained image in Jenna or Lumian's minds.
To put it simply, her answer to the question "Is there really no one in this world you care about?" had changed, so she was hesitant to actively pursue a new intimate partner.
Jenna had no substantial intimate experience, so she didn't know how to set a mood for such situations. She could only revert to the straightforward seduction from when she was Little Minx, but she didn't want to deceive my feelings and make me fall deeper. That's why she acted that way yesterday.
Thankfully, she's relatively level-headed. She didn't seek a lover to make me give up, allowing me to truly find a new intimate partner. Yes, she might think that would be giving me prolonged pain and not prolonged pleasure. It would have hindered my digestion of the potion... Franca felt even more dejected after piecing together the entire situation.
...
On the stairs leading to Apartment 702.
Jenna held a bag of bread and a basket of beef, vegetables, and fruits, reluctant to go back inside.
Recalling yesterday's events made her blush, unsure of how to face Franca.

In her previous days as a Showy Diva singer, she had witnessed others' affection and felt it was just so-so. Although exciting, she thought she could endure it.
Unexpectedly, after experiencing it for real, she realized pleasure could make people become consumed by it.
Phew... Jenna took a few deep breaths to calm herself.
What troubled her now was how to interact with Franca.
Wait, should I pretend nothing happened and face her with my usual demeanor? Should I be more cheerful and take the initiative to mention yesterday, pretending it's no big deal so Franca doesn't mind?
But won't this upset her? She needs to digest the Pleasure potion...
Besides, one pleasure encounter is definitely not enough. I have to spend time with her as a couple...
Should I keep seducing her tonight like yesterday, or wait for her to initiate?
Dammit, how annoying!
Jenna found such matters more vexing than assassinating powerful figures. Whether avenging herself on Margot or killing Hugues Artois, she had always felt death was the worst outcome—no big deal. However, this situation clearly hadn't reached life-or-death stakes. The subsequent troubles would linger.
Jenna couldn't help but feel frustrated at the thought of maintaining an intimate physical relationship with Franca and all the complexities involved. She wished she could simply assassinate the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, instead.
Taking deep breaths to steady her emotions, Jenna analyzed how to approach this from an actress's perspective to make Franca more accepting of future intimacies.
She had already taken the first bold step. She definitely wasn't willing to give up now. She planned to continue their relationship until Franca finished digesting the Pleasure potion's effects.
After figuring out her next move, Jenna's lips curled into a faint smile.
Carrying bread and ingredients, she briskly climbed the stairs and returned to Apartment 702.
As soon as she opened the door, Franca jumped up from the recliner instinctively and forced a smile. She said nervously, "You're back?"
Amused by Franca's actions, Jenna chuckled and sighed inwardly.
How great would it be if you didn't want to become lovers...
Jenna calmly walked to the dining table and placed her items on it. Then, she glared at Franca.
"What are you waiting for? Help me!"

"Alright, alright." Franca hurried over.
Seeing that Jenna wasn't reserved or distant, nor reverted to her usual demeanor, she felt an inexplicable relief. She even began to anticipate the night's arrival.
...
Sizzle. Sizzle.
The juices from a piece of beef dripped onto the fire, transforming into smoke that swirled upwards, blending with the aroma of spices. This caused Ludwig to swallow a few mouthfuls of saliva.
However, the boy patiently waited, not rushing the cook until the beef roasted to its optimal state.
Lumian turned his body and gazed at a three-story building diagonally across from the restaurant.
The yellowish-brown house was the former residence rebuilt by Hisoka Twanaku.

Chapter 661: "Reconnaissance Tools"

During lunch, Lumian used the excuse of going to the washroom to make his way to Hisoka Twanaku's tawny house.

After ascending the wooden stairs and passing through the empty, open ground floor, he took out a new wire and picked the lock on the door.

This level was completely open-air, leaving only support pillars. At a glance, it was very spacious and simple.

Stepping onto the wooden floor, Lumian circled around but found signs that no one had lived here for a long time. He found nothing worth further investigating.

Suddenly, a voice came from behind him.

"What's the problem here?"

The voice belonged to Camus Castiya. When he saw Lumian enter Twanaku's rebuilt house from the dining room window, he found an excuse to leave the table and hurry over.

Lumian wasn't surprised at all. He looked around and said, "Nothing."

As he spoke, he ascended the stairs to the third floor.

Camus sighed silently and followed.

He felt his mentality had aged considerably when with Louis Berry, resembling someone Vice-Captain Reaza's age.

Oh, Mother Earth, I'm not even twenty-four years old!

Although I arrived in Matani at eighteen and joined the patrol team, dealing with numerous Beyonder incidents, participating in dangerous battles, and accumulating extensive experience, I am still a young man—a laidback young man who doesn't focus on appearances in daily life!

With a solemn, vigilant mindset, Camus followed Lumian through the third-floor rooms twice, searching through all the items.

"There's nothing out of place." After setting down a pen holder, Camus shared his assessment with Lumian.

Lumian hadn't gained anything either.

After a moment's contemplation, he responded, "Bring Kolobo here later and ask if there are any areas that make him uneasy, dangerous, or uncomfortable."

Having only collaborated once, he's already adept at utilizing Kolobo's uniqueness... Bringing Kolobo here... Why does it feel like a police officer asking a constable to bring a canine unit... Camus criticized inwardly and nodded.

"Understood."

As Lumian surveyed his surroundings again, he thought, I'll bring Ludwig over later and ask if he detects any fragrance of special

ingredients.
Returning to the dining room with Camus, Lumian indulged in the Gwadar beverage, savoring the rich and intricate aroma of roasted beef, roasted chicken wings, roasted snake meat, roasted spiders, and roasted leeches...
After eating and drinking his fill, Lumian took Ludwig's hand and led him to "Hisoka" Twanaku's house. Camus, Lugano, and Kolobo —who wore sunglasses and walked sideways like a crab—followed closely behind.
After exploring every nook and cranny, Lumian looked at Ludwig and asked with a smile, "Is there anything edible here?"
Ludwig shook his head. "No."
Lumian led the boy down to the second level and looked at Kolobo, who had suddenly turned his back to them, and Camus.
"Do any of you sense anything unusual?"
The thin Kolobo hesitated for a moment and said, "This house feels a little cold. It doesn't sit well with me."
"Where exactly?" Lumian inquired with a calm expression.
Kolobo replied succinctly, "Everywhere."
There's something wrong with the entire house and even this land? Hisoka definitely didn't rebuild his previous home for nostalgia. He's not the original owner of that body, so he probably doesn't have much attachment to this place. He's also a true Coldblooded... Lumian pondered for over ten seconds and said to Lugano, Camus, and the others, "Stay here and guard against any mishaps."
He returned to the third floor and lay on a wooden bed with traces of someone having slept in it.
Large, black mosquitoes flew over with crackling sounds. However, in the flickering sparks, they were ignited one by one, turning into charred corpses that floated onto the bed.
Lumian quickly slipped into a deep slumber.
In his daze, he slowly awoke.
Pa! Lumian took out the golden pocket watch from Salle de Bal Brisé, opened it, and muttered to himself, "Slept for half an hour and didn't have any special dreams..."
He had always believed the Dream Festival was related to dreams, so he deliberately slept in Hisoka's house, but nothing happened.
Lumian gazed at the midday sun shining through the window and stood up thoughtfully.
Could the timing be off?
Must I sleep at a specific time and place to participate in the Dream Festival?
Therefore, most Tizamo Town residents are unaware of its

existence...
When Lumian returned to the spacious but crude second level, he realized Camus and the others now had three more people with them.
One was a man in his thirties with a painted face. His light brown skin and thick lips gave him a relatively clean-cut look, and his black hair fell to his shoulders. A strong pungent smell wafted from him. The other was a young woman wearing dark leather armor. Her brown hair was tied in two strands draped over her shoulders. Her light brown skin and facial features exuded a wild beauty. She carried a hunting bow and a leather quiver of arrows on her back.
Another man, dressed similarly to Camus and the others in a shirt and thin pants, stood over 1.9 meters tall with an appearance leaning towards the Feysac Empire. He had short light-blond hair, light-blue eyes, and a face bearing signs of exposure to sun and rain.
"They're our colleagues, members of the Tizamo Town patrol team," Camus introduced.
He pointed at the man with the white paint pattern on his face and said, "Captain of the local patrol team, Maslow.
"His teammate..."
Camus turned to the wild-looking woman with a bow and arrows on her back and the tall Feysacian man and said, "Rhea.
"Loban, used to be an adventurer."
He spoke in Intisian the entire time.
Finally, Camus addressed the three local patrol team members, "This is the great adventurer, Louis Berry. The other two are his assistant and godson."
"This is the great adventurer, Louis Berry.
"The other two are his assistant and godson."
"Great adventurer..." Maslow repeated the term and cast his gaze at Loban.
Feysacian Loban shook his head, indicating he had never heard of him.
Maslow averted his gaze and asked Lumian, "Are you here to hunt?"
Tizamo Town had been a favorite hunting ground for Port Pylos's gentry for decades. There was no shortage of residents proficient in Intisian, and the patrol team had language requirements to handle the gentry's requests.
Lumian responded with a smile, "Something like that."
Hunting for Hisoka's inheritance and hidden issues was also a form of hunting.

Seeing the skeptical expressions on Maslow and the others' faces, Camus hurriedly explained, "Do you remember the telegram sent last night?"
"You mean..." With her hunting bow and arrows, Rhea couldn't help but glance at Lumian again.
Clearly, she, Maslow, and company had just arrived and hadn't had time to discuss the detailed situation with Camus and Kolobo. A telegram could only convey limited information.
Camus nodded solemnly.
"Monsieur Louis Berry is here to investigate the hidden issues behind Twanaku."
Using the excuse of inspecting the house again, he led the three local patrol team members upstairs.
Lugano glanced at the stairs and asked Kolobo, who had his back to them, "There's a local patrol team in Tizamo?"
Based on his experience, there shouldn't be any official Beyonder teams permanently stationed in the Northern Continent's small towns and villages like Port Pylos. They would typically send someone to handle issues as they arose.
Kolobo turned his back to Lumian and Ludwig, trembling as he replied, "Most other towns don't have them. This place is rather special and is often attacked by primitive tribes. Not only did our patrol team station a permanent team here, but the Admiral Guard also has Beyonders at the military camp outside town."
Lugano glanced at the strange official Beyonder who doubled as their carriage driver and couldn't hide his curiosity.
"Why do you always have your back to us and wear black sunglasses?"
Don't you want others to discover something's wrong with your eyes?"
Kolobo fell silent, unsure if he should answer.
At that moment, Camus led Maslow and the others back to the second floor.
When they looked at Lumian again, Maslow, Rhea, and Loban's expressions turned much more serious.
Lumian smiled and asked casually, "Did anything unusual happen with this house?"
"No," Maslow had already recalled the relevant details.
With a nod, Lumian replied, "Were you transferred to Tizamo after the attack last year?"
He recalled the dossier had mentioned the three Beyonders stationed here perished in the primitive tribe's attack.
"Yes," Loban, the former Feysacian adventurer, replied in a rough voice. "It's been nearly a year. It's been very peaceful here. No more

attacks."
According to the records, the tribe in the primitive forest attacked two to three times a year in past years... Admiral Querarill's response of sending more guards and army deterred the primitive tribe from taking the risk. Did they really retreat into the forest depths? Or did the April Fool's prank cause something to change? Lumian sensed something amiss.
After conversing for a while, Lumian prepared to take Ludwig and Lugano to check into the motel.
Maslow took a few steps forward and retrieved two items from a small leather bag hanging from his waist.
There were brown candles and a glass bottle filled with a light-yellow liquid.
"Mosquito repellent candles and tranquil essential oil. I hope you get a good night's sleep," Maslow said in accented Intisian.
Camus chimed in, "What he means is that this place is close to the primitive forest, and mosquitoes and poisonous insects are everywhere. Although you're Beyonders, it won't be pleasant if you're accidentally bitten. Furthermore, you won't be able to sleep peacefully and will keep waking up."
"The mosquito repellent candles are made from plants that mosquitoes dislike. Tranquil essential oil comes from certain animals, making those damned buzzing fellows stay away from you."
At this point, Camus, Maslow, Rhea, and the others suddenly realized there were no mosquitoes on the entire second level.
Lumian turned to Ludwig and accepted the candle and oil with a smile.
Then, he gently pinched his nose to confirm the pungent smell on Maslow and the others came from the tranquil essential oil.
After Lumian, Ludwig, and Lugano left Twanaku's house, Maslow looked at Kolobo, who had his back to everyone, in confusion. He asked in Dutanese, "What's wrong?"

Chapter 662: Those Words

Kolobo finally turned around.

He took off his sunglasses and spoke in Dutanese with a weary look, "My gut tells me I shouldn't look directly at them. I can only take a quick glance at most."

"Why's that?" Rhea asked curiously, her wildness evident as she carried her hunting bow.

"Just intuition," Kolobo replied firmly, unsure of the reason but convinced he shouldn't stare.

Loban, the Feysacian, wore a pensive expression.

"What's on your mind?" Maslow, his face painted white, turned to him and asked.

The three had worked together in Tizamo Town for a year and understood each other well. Maslow could tell Loban had thought of something from his look.

Observing Camus and the others' gazes, Loban pondered for a moment before saying, "While adventuring across the Five Seas, I came across this saying: 'Don't look directly at God.'"

"Don't look directly at God..." Camus's forehead twitched as he whispered the phrase.

As a Castiya family descendant, albeit from a collateral branch, he had more extensive mystical knowledge than most Beyonders.

Could it be that Louis Berry and his godson were actual gods, unable to be gazed upon?

No, that couldn't be right. Kolobo avoided looking at Twanaku directly, yet Twanaku was merely a Sequence 5 Beyonder of the Prisoner and Criminal pathways—not even a demigod!

"I've heard that before during the padre's sermons. It's about respecting and worshiping God, right?" said Rhea, a devout Eternal Blazing Sun believer.

"No, it's not from the Church scriptures. It's recorded in a mystical text," Loban shook his head, rejecting her explanation.

Maslow let out a deep chuckle.

"Surely the great adventurer can't literally be a deity walking among us?"

"Maybe not a true deity," Loban recalled, "But the book's notes state it refers to a 'Mythical Creature'. I'm unsure what exactly that means, but if it contains the word 'god', it must have at least some level of godhood. Could that adventurer be a demigod?"

"It doesn't seem that way currently," Camus said, gradually forming a new idea. "Perhaps the adventurer is simply one of a deity's Blessed, carrying a divine item or aura bestowed upon him. So it's true we can't directly look at 'God', but that 'God' isn't

referring to him, only something he possesses."
This could explain the situation with Twanaku very well.
"You mean like the most famous adventurer?" Loban the Feysacian realized.
Adventurers, treasure hunters, pirates and merchants across the Five Seas now knew Gehrman Sparrow had been The Fool's Oracle before becoming an Angel.
"Precisely." Camus nodded.
Simultaneously, he inwardly cursed.
Dogsh*t, why was I sent to watch over matters involving a deity's Blessed?
This was undoubtedly perilous. A moment of carelessness could lead to death!
Camus hadn't wanted to accept Vice-Captain Reaza's order the day before, but over the past five years, Reaza had saved him from the brink of death three times. He couldn't refuse.
Otherwise, with the prestigious "Don" prefix and Castiya family name, he could have declined his superior's orders. At worst, he could leave the patrol team and seek opportunities elsewhere. After all, he had already digested the Sequence 7 Interrogator potion. He had saved enough funds for his subsequent advancement thanks to Louis Berry's two commissions. Even returning to his family, he wouldn't be the type brushed aside.
But to repay Reaza's kindness, Camus reluctantly agreed to come to Tizamo Town and monitor Louis Berry's every move. Feeling upset, he couldn't help but inwardly curse.
As a devout and educated believer in Mother Earth, Camus wouldn't curse with vulgar phrases like "son of a..." From his view, mothers were great—birth and nurturing equally important, just as the earth nurtured all things' growth.
After discussing the adventurer Louis Berry, Loban the Feysacian turned to Camus and Kolobo, saying, "When we transferred to Tizamo, we were told we could return after a year, that we wouldn't stay forever. Now, nearly a year has passed, and you're here too. Does that mean we can return to Port Pylos?"
As a Feysacian, you appear tall, robust, boorish, and unintelligent, but you're actually dishonest... Did you discover that Louis Berry's matter might be a huge problem and want an excuse to slip away early? Camus acutely sensed Loban's hidden thoughts and joked, "There's still a week left! Don't even think about returning to Port Pylos early. We're not here for your rotation."
...
At the Brieu Motel.
This was the favorite accommodation for the gentlemen who

came to Tizamo Town to hunt. Although it couldn't compare to Hotel Orella, it was at least relatively clean.
Lumian's sole reason for choosing this place was the availability of a suite.
Otherwise, he would have to rent two adjacent rooms and utilize his Hunter's precise grasp of structures to blast through the adjoining wall without affecting the overall load-bearing walls. When departing, he'd get Lugano to replace the stone bricks and repair the opening.
The ground floor was equally open, supported by stone pillars. However, the three-story building above bore a distinct Intisian flair. The beige walls, recessed statuary niches, arched windows, and venetian curtains made Lumian feel as if he had returned to Trier.
When Lugano lit the mosquito repellent candle and used its slightly pungent smell to chase away the poisonous insects and mosquitoes, it became even more reminiscent.
This is very similar to Trieriens using sulfur's smell to repel bedbugs... Lumian recalled his initial arrival in Trier.
After using sulfur's smell to chase the bedbugs into the neighboring room, playwright Gabriel ignited it and drove them back. After this back-and-forth, most bedbugs went elsewhere, leaving only a few that the doll messenger eliminated.
Lumian sighed silently, recalling Gabriel's death and the deceased tenants of the Auberge du Coq Doré.
He walked to the window and gazed at the street below.
The gentlemen in hunting attire and their servants on unicorns weaved through the dark-brown or light-brown townspeople, flowing into Brieu Motel, jungle restaurants, and other establishments like rivers.
Under the noon sun, Tizamo Town was scorchingly humid this season, making it unsuitable for outdoor activities.
On the second floor, Lumian focused his attention and observed the passersby directly below.
He attempted to discern any potential issues with Tizamo Town from their fortunes.
He was prepared for backlash or corruption.
These passersby's fortunes are normal. Some seem to have romantic encounters looming, some would lose money, and some might encounter a bloody calamity, but nothing too serious...
Lumian averted his gaze and said to Lugano, "Take Ludwig to rest. I'll take a walk outside."
"Alright." Knowing the trip to Tizamo Town might be dangerous, Lugano had no intention of wandering out unless his boss asked

him to prepare food for Ludwig.
He had no choice but to go along. Otherwise, he would be the one eaten!
Tizamo Town wasn't small with streets spanning out in two directions. Lumian strolled leisurely, hands in pockets, donning a golden straw hat.
He no longer wore the straw hat to enhance Louis Berry's persona, but to shield himself from the sunlight. He had intended to do so many times before.
This was because an adverse effect of Shadow Transformation was a greater fear of sunlight than ordinary people.
Although Lumian could endure relying on his Ascetic abilities, this would impact his condition to some extent. Why make things difficult when he could resolve it with a straw hat?
Moreover, with the appearance of Louis Berry wearing a golden straw hat, the enemy wouldn't think he was afraid of sunlight.
As his gaze casually shifted, Lumian spotted a girl.
She was a typical Northern Continent native, her black hair cascading down her back like a waterfall, a few sparkling bows adorning her head. Her azure-tinged eyes accentuated her sharp, delicate nose. An unmistakable youthful aura radiated between her brows.
The girl wore a light, lace-trimmed, pleated white dress, but instead of high heels, she donned a pair of brown leather boots. As she conversed and laughed with companions, she danced, seemingly unconcerned about passersby's opinions.
Lumian glanced at her again.
It wasn't because she was beautiful. Although quite lovely, her appearance and bearing couldn't compare to a Demoness or truly beautiful humans.
Lumian simply sensed her personality differed from Trier's ladies.
In Trier, no matter how open-minded respectable middle and upper-class women were in private, they still publicly cared about image and others' opinions—a product of their upbringing.
This girl exuded an air of freedom. She could laugh loudly or spin around whenever she pleased.
This was distinct from an improperly raised lower-class woman's demeanor. This girl's attire, speech and aura indicated good education and upbringing.
"Amandina, daughter of Palms Manor's Sir Petit, and Monsieur Robert's fiancée," Camus, resembling a specter, materialized from nowhere beside Lumian with the introduction.
Palms Manor was a plantation near Tizamo Town.
A Southern Continent girl raised without Trier's upper-

middle-class societal constraints... As Lumian judged this, he thought of his sister Aurore.
Sometimes, Aurore displayed such a side.
However, the reasons were clearly different.
"Where are you headed?" Camus inquired.
Lumian retracted his gaze and replied with a smile, "The cathedral.
"Are you coming with me to praise the Sun?"

Chapter 663: Late Night

Like many cathedrals in Intis, Tizamo's had a golden dome, resembling the sun's reflection on the ground.

As Lumian passed through the door, he was dazzled by the walls, arches, gold leaf inlaid in the dome, a mural sprinkled with golden powder, and a golden statue. The sunlight streaming through the glass behind the altar made him instinctively raise his hand, wanting to press down his golden straw hat.

It was lunchtime, and many simply-dressed Tizamo residents sat in various pews, heads bowed in prayer.

They didn't mind the cathedral's dazzling, extravagant appearance at all.

This was not only because they had always believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun since childhood, but they also had numerous gold mines in the former Balam Empire. The people had a widespread fondness for gold, a hobby preserved to this day.

Lumian shared an affinity for gold, but didn't want to endure the scorching sunlight.

Beside him, Camus tried explaining, "I'm not monitoring you, nor am I saying I'll follow you everywhere to prevent accidents.

"I'm assisting you. You're still unfamiliar with Dutanese. You lack sufficient understanding of the situation in Tizamo and the people here. I can introduce you."

Lumian seized the opportunity to turn and ask with a smile, "Do you know it well?"

Camus ruffled his disheveled brown hair and replied without embarrassment, "If there's anything I don't understand, I can ask Maslow and the others to help."

Lumian didn't mind having an official Beyonder by his side. If anything happened, he could use the extra muscle.

He nodded slightly and said, "If you want to follow, go ahead."

As Lumian spoke, he walked towards the row of seats in front of the altar under the blazing sunlight.

Camus hesitated for a few seconds before finding a seat in the farthest corner of the cathedral.

As a believer of Earth Mother, he could freely enter and exit the cathedrals of all orthodox gods, but he couldn't participate in acts of worship.

He only knew that Louis Berry had a close connection to the Church of The Fool, but he wasn't sure if his faith was with The Fool.

Lumian used his Ascetic endurance to control the twitching of his facial muscles. He sat down under the sunlight as if nothing

happened and lowered his head to pray in front of the preaching padre.
The padre, a native of Port Pylos named Cali, had standard dark brown skin, sunken eyes, and a chiseled face. He only had a thin layer of black hair, not wearing a clergyman's hat.
In his forties with a solemn expression, he preached in unaccented Intisian.
Lumian, feigning prayer, found himself distracted. Thoughts raced through his mind, making him feel as if he had returned to Cordu. Back then, even when attending Mass and praying in the cathedral, he was lost in his own thoughts. When it was almost over, he quickly praised the Sun and wished his sister would always be healthy and that he wouldn't need much homework or test prep to get into university.
None of that came true.
After the padre finished preaching, Lumian raised his head and narrowed his eyes in the sunlight, focusing on observing the padre's fortune.
There was nothing special about it.
On the surface, there's indeed nothing abnormal about Tizamo...
Amidst sunburn-like pain, Lumian planned to avert his gaze, but his heart stirred as he activated his Reaper's Weakness Investigation ability.
He thought of Padre Guillaume Bénet and Father Montserrat of the Church of Earth Mother.
Who said clergymen from orthodox Churches wouldn't be problematic?
In that case, he could observe the padre's weaknesses in advance. If he truly encountered clerical depravity in the future, he could quickly resolve it.
Various colors appeared on the padre's body in Lumian's eyes.
However, there was no pale-white among them!
This meant the padre had no weaknesses!
Impossible. Even if this padre is a Beyonder, his Sequence shouldn't be too high. *How can he have no weaknesses?* The Sun pathway isn't known for toughness and imperviousness... *Could he be from another pathway?* No, all likely have weaknesses... Amidst surprise, Lumian observed more closely.
Finally, he noticed a faint pallor.
It wasn't on the padre's body, but in the depths of his Astral Projection.
Does this mean his weakness lies in his spirit, fearing attacks targeting his Spirit Body? How did he manage to have no bodily weaknesses... From the looks of it, I have to dismantle his body

piece by piece to kill him if I'm not targeting his Spirit Body...
Lumian's surprise quickly dissipated, replaced by joy and anticipation.
Regardless, discovering any abnormalities was a good thing!
This meant he was a step closer to the problem in Tizamo and the Dream Festival Hisoka had mentioned.
"Brother, what are you looking at?" Cali asked Lumian with a smile, clutching a Bible.
Lumian responded with a smile, "Looking at the sunlight on you.
"Praise the Sun!"
With that, Lumian stood up, spread his arms slightly, and turned to leave.
Now was not the time to delve into the abnormality in the padre's body.
Padre Cali was delighted by Lumian's response.
Firstly, the other party was subtly praising him for being bathed in sunlight, akin to a deity's blessings. Secondly, as a local clergyman without Northern blood, he had always yearned for Northern gentry's recognition.
After leaving the Saint-Sien Cathedral, Lumian casually had Camus circle the entirety of Tizamo twice with him, including the military camp, plantation, and the outskirts of the primitive forest.
Camus eagerly introduced everyone he knew.
As evening approached, Lumian made his way towards the Brieu Motel and asked, "What did you do with that dead horse?"
"I sold it to the butcher. I'm planning to buy a new one from a nearby planter," Camus replied matter-of-factly.
Lumian felt a twinge of disappointment for Ludwig. He remained silent and entered the motel.
Late at night.
In the shadows outside the Brieu Motel, Lumian emerged, no longer wearing his golden straw hat. He strolled towards the yellowish-brown house that "Hisoka" Twanaku had rebuilt.
It was nearly midnight, and Tizamo had grown very quiet. Apart from a few patrolling soldiers, drunk patrons, and their companions, no one else was walking outside.
Under the crimson moonlight, Lumian passed by the bar named Giant Boa and heard a commotion inside.
In the primitive forest a few hundred meters away, the howls of wild beasts echoed intermittently.
Lumian proceeded until he reached his destination. He ascended to the third level and found the wooden bed he had slept on earlier.
He busied himself for a while, making preparations. He wasn't in a

hurry to lie down. He looked around and muttered to himself thoughtfully, "Termiboros, have you noticed anything unusual here?"
Termiboros's majestic voice reverberated within Lumian's body.
"I'm using your eyes, ears, nose, spirituality, and fate to observe the outside world—just slightly more than what you see."
Does this mean that what I see and discover will still be restricted by my body, spirituality, and level? Hold on, this fellow is becoming more and more like a riddler. He didn't directly answer if there's anything abnormal about this house or what's abnormal... Lumian scoffed.
"Are you truly an Angel of the Fate domain? I'm already a Sequence 5, and you can't use my eyes and spirituality to detect the problem here. Haven't you noticed that a Sequence 8 of the Monster pathway can sense that this place is cold?
"No way. Are Angels of the Inevitability pathway inferior to Sequence 8s of the Fate pathway?"
The Monster pathway was also known as the Fate pathway.
Lumian provoked Termiboros to see if he could extract any useful information from this Angel-level Ascetic.
He didn't hold out much hope, but at least he wouldn't lose anything.
Termiboros fell silent, as if He had vanished from Lumian's body.
"How tolerant. As expected of an Ascetic Angel," Lumian mocked.
He took out the golden pocket watch he had obtained from Salle de Bal Brise and flipped it open to confirm the current time.
11:51 p.m.
Putting away his pocket watch, Lumian lay on the wooden bed in the room.
This time, he was here to see if sleeping in the house at night would trigger any abnormalities and if he could enter a special dream to participate in the Dream Festival.
To this end, Lumian had instructed Ludwig in advance to wake him up in the house rebuilt by Twanaku if he wasn't back by the time they had their second meal.
After Lumian promised there would be a feast the next day, Ludwig agreed.
With crackling sounds, the menacing spiders crawling on the outer walls of the house and the numerous mosquitoes in the room burned and fell, emitting a charred fragrance.
Relying on Cogitation, Lumian swiftly drifted into a deep slumber.
In a daze, he slowly woke up. He straightened up and realized that he was still on the wooden bed, in the master bedroom on the third floor of Hisoka's house.

It was late at night outside the window, and the crimson moonlight seemed to be obscured by clouds. Only a small amount of light filtered through, making it abnormally dim.
The howling of wild beasts in the primitive forest and the faint noise from the bar had completely ceased. The night had entered its most peaceful state, as silent as death.
There's no change... Lumian sighed in disappointment.
Just as he was about to take out his golden pocket watch to confirm the time and leave the house in the dark environment to return to the Brieu Motel, his pupils suddenly dilated and his eyes froze.
Under the dim crimson moonlight, Lumian swiftly scanned the room's floor.
He didn't see mosquito corpses!
The mosquitoes he had incinerated with his Pyromaniac powers before falling asleep should have been charred on the ground, but now, they were nowhere to be found. The floor was clean as if it had just been cleaned!
Could it be that someone came in while I was asleep and cleaned the room? I've planted several traps around me. They can't be easily bypassed... Wraith? Lumian instantly tensed up. He took out the golden pocket watch he had previously kept in his shirt pocket under his vest and flipped it open to check the time.
11:58 p.m.

Chapter 664: Confirming the Boundary

11:58?

Lumian's gaze fixated on the golden pocket watch, his suspicions heightened by the peculiar scent in the air.

He felt as though he had slumbered for more than an hour. *Why then had only seven minutes elapsed?*

Though the unreliability of his instincts were plausible, other anomalies lurked. The absence of mosquito corpses and the eerie silence hinted at peculiarities.

Lumian, drawing from his past encounters, murmured to himself, *Could it be that I've entered a special dream?*

In the dead of night, slumbering within this tawny house leads to a peculiar dream?

Did "Hisoka" Twanaku rebuild the house to make it look less suspicious for him to stay there?

But why would such a thing happen?

Lumian bowed his head and peered ahead. His gaze seemed to penetrate through wooden planks and various obstacles, revealing the corresponding underground area.

Uncertain about the origin of this anomaly, he could only speculate based on common sense and experience.

In the silent darkness, Lumian shuffled his feet, producing creaking sounds as he left the house that once belonged to "Hisoka" Twanaku.

The street lay deserted, and many of the livestock on the ground floor of the buildings seemed to blend into the night. It was impossible to discern if they still existed. The footsteps of patrolling soldiers had vanished completely.

A warm, humid night breeze swept through the unobstructed streets, surrounding Lumian as he headed towards the entrance of the Giant Boa bar.

Straining his ears, Lumian noticed that it was so quiet that even the rustling of insects and the buzzing of mosquitoes had ceased.

His expression remained unchanged as he extended his right hand, pushing open the heavy wooden door.

Darkness shrouded the interior. With the dim moonlight filtering through the window and Lumian's sharp eyesight as a Hunter, he could barely discern the outlines of the bar counter, liquor cabinet, small round table, chairs, candlestick wall lamps, and other items, but not a single human was in sight.

The bar seemed to have been closed for quite some time.

This is even more perplexing. Before I fell asleep, this bar was quite lively. It's impossible for them to clear out the customers and clean

every corner in seven to eight minutes.
Based on my experience, even though countryside bars close earlier than those in the city and aren't bustling until two or three in the morning, they usually continue selling alcohol until midnight. Also, they usually ask those who are still drinking to leave after they're done. If they encounter a drunk who refuses to leave, it tends to cause some delay... Lumian, a regular at Cordu's Ol' Tavern, felt confident in making such judgments, drawing from his various experiences in different bars.
This conviction only strengthened his belief that he was caught in what seemed to be a very real dream.
Suddenly, memories of past events in Cordu flooded Lumian's mind, causing his grip on the heavy wooden door of the Giant Boa bar to freeze.
After a moment of contemplation, he decided to leave and headed back to the Brieu Motel.
Walking through the dark stairs and a corridor paved with aged planks, Lumian returned to his suite on the second floor at a moderate pace. He pushed open the wooden door to the child's room.
The dim crimson moonlight poured into the room, illuminating the sky-blue patterned blanket and bedsheets.
But no one was sleeping here.
Ludwig had disappeared too.
Combined with the strange sights on his way, Lumian strongly suspected that he was alone in this dream.
All the townsfolk, livestock, and outsiders had vanished, leaving him in solitude in Tizamo Town!
This can't be considered a festival unless it is named the Loneliness Festival... Lumian pondered for a few seconds before leaving the Brieu Motel and heading towards the Saint-Sien Cathedral near the cemetery.
In the dim moonlit night, the cathedral's golden dome and various decorations on the outer walls seemed to lose their glow, settling into a deep slumber.
Lumian didn't want to waste energy pushing open the front door. He pried open a stained glass window and jumped in.
In the night's darkness, the place was silent and empty. The dome above exuded an oppressive and cold aura that was absent during the day.
Lumian searched the area but couldn't find Padre Cali— who had exhibited abnormalities—the deputy padre, or any odd-job workers.
I'm truly alone...

Only those who sleep in Hisoka's house can enter this special dream?
Yes, and it has to be late at night.
How can the Dream Festival be held? One can't expect all the relevant people to line up at Hisoka's house to sleep at a specific time, right? Disregarding the question of whether we can squeeze in, how did such a widespread collective act deceive the patrol team and the army outside the town?
Moreover, it doesn't seem like everyone has been pulled into the dream. The Tizamons I previously found were completely unaware...
And the most crucial question: Since it's a dream, why am I lucid?
Lumian contemplated for a moment before reaching out his right hand to touch the wall adorned with the religious mural.
It felt cold and solid, a genuine stone.
Drawing on his extensive experience in realistic dreams, Lumian pushed aside these questions, opting to begin with the simplest reconnaissance.
He aimed to confirm the dimensions of this dream and its boundaries.
Activating the black mark on his right shoulder, Lumian connected with the spirit world. He "saw" every corner of Tizamo Town.
Through Spirit World Traversal, he disappeared and reappeared on the packed earth path leading from Tizamo Town to Port Pylos.
Teleportation is possible... That's true. Since it's a dream, nothing is impossible. As long as I believe it's feasible, I should be able to do it... Following the Cordu incident, Lumian delved into numerous dream-related books and sought counsel from Madam Justice, Madam Susie, Anthony Reid, and other Beyonders in the mind domain, gaining a profound understanding.
Slowing his pace, he headed towards Port Pylos. After walking for two to three hundred meters, the scenery ahead blurred, as if an ethereal fog was swirling. Beneath the faint moonlight, the fog appeared pitch-black.
Suddenly, Lumian's spiritual intuition warned him that entering the misty area, veiled in an illusionary fog, might be perilous. There was a high likelihood that something terrifying would occur.
There are indeed limitations. I can't directly reach the edge of the mind... Lumian decided against taking the risk. He swiftly returned to Tizamo and began searching for the other boundary.
This was the area near the primitive forest.
After covering a distance of 300 to 400 meters, Lumian reached the forest's edge. Rainforest-like vegetation stood silently in the night, resembling dense tombstones.

Noticing no blurry areas veiled in illusory fog, Lumian proceeded cautiously and decisively.
Passing through drooping vines and trees, he delved deeper into the primitive forest, walking on the thick, humus-covered ground.
Along the way, there were no dancing mosquitoes or venomous creatures concealed among the vegetation.
After another 700 to 800 meters, Lumian sensed his surroundings becoming more psychedelic.
Some areas became blurry, others distorted, and some became clearer. However, upon closer inspection, they couldn't be seen distinctly.
The conditions in these areas continued to fluctuate.
This feels more like a typical dream... With no warning from his spirituality, Lumian took a few more steps forward.
Suddenly, the entire world shattered into scenes that interweaved and materialized around him.
Lumian's lucidity wavered, leaving him slightly disoriented.
In the next moment, he witnessed scenes of black boulders and humans in dark robes.
One of the humans raised his head, revealing a pale-white face with a light brown base, flaxen-colored eyes tinged with dark green, and decent facial features.
Hisoka!
"Hisoka" Twanaku!
He was "Hisoka" Twanaku!
The human in the dark robe, embodying "Hisoka" Twanaku's visage, straightened up.
His gaze seemed to transcend various scenes and fixate on Lumian.
Amidst the illusory sound, the scenes around Lumian shattered.
Lumian sat up and found himself back in the tawny building that "Hisoka" Twanaku had rebuilt. He was in the dark room with the simple wooden bed.
Quickly surveying his surroundings, Lumian retrieved a golden pocket watch from the left breast pocket of his shirt. Clicking it open, he checked the time.
1:38 a.m.
The crimson moonlight outside the window wasn't too bright, but it wasn't dim either. The nearby Giant Boa bar had already closed, yet the howl of a wild beast echoed from the distant primitive forest.
The night was silent but not deathly still.
I'm awake? That's more like it. I slept for an hour or more than 40 minutes, quite close to my estimation... Lumian got out of bed and

observed the ground. As expected, he saw charred mosquito corpses and numerous insects lingering outside the window, blocked by the smell of tranquil essential oil.

Phew. He breathed a sigh of relief and contemplated the appearance of "Hisoka" Twanaku in the special dream.

Since it's a festival, Dream Festival shouldn't be held just once—that's what a party is. Could Hisoka have participated in many Dream Festivals in the past few years and left some kind of mark in the dream?

Is Dream Festival indeed related to that primitive tribe? That's why I activated certain imprints and images recorded in the dream after venturing deep into the forest. That's how I saw Hisoka...

What purpose does Hisoka intend to achieve with the Dream Festival?

Dream Festival, Dream Festival. Since it's a festival, it must be held on a fixed date. At other times, if I enter a special dream, I won't encounter anything, just like me tonight?

What date could it be?

Lumian fell into deep thought.

He quickly deduced a direction.

On December 17th of last year, the primitive tribe attacked Tizamo Town, causing numerous casualties.

Lumian perked up and swiftly confirmed today's date. Dream Festival happens on December 17th, or two or three days before it, which is when April Fool's played their prank here?

It was past 1 a.m. on December 11th.

Chapter 665: Clues

If the Dream Festival has a fixed date, as I suspect, it should be one of the coming days or span a few days...

Recently, I came to Hisoka's house every night to sleep, trying not to miss the Dream Festival. I also need to figure out the basic patterns of the special dream as much as possible before it begins. For example, how to leave the dream normally without entering the primitive forest...

Lumian closed the golden pocket watch and slipped it into the breast pocket of his shirt, concealed by his vest.

He didn't continue sleeping there. Instead, he chose to descend the stairs and enter the streets of Tizamo. First, Ludwig would have his second supper in twenty minutes. According to their agreement, if Lumian didn't return in time, Ludwig would come over and forcefully wake him up. Second, he had to update Madam Magician on his discoveries.

Just as Lumian stepped out of Hisoka's house, a voice suddenly sounded from behind.

"What exactly are you investigating?"

In a dark corner where the crimson moonlight couldn't reach, Camus Castiya emerged, dressed in a white shirt and an unbuttoned yellow vest. His disheveled hair collapsed from staying up too late.

At some point, the young leader of the Port Pylos patrol team's combat team had been waiting here.

Lumian wasn't surprised at all, as if he had sensed Camus' presence. He evaded the question and said, "Many scenes display different states during the day and at night."

"Indeed." Camus had dealt with numerous mystical incidents that matched this description. The simplest and most common situation was that certain haunted houses appeared normal under the sunlight.

As Lumian walked towards the Brieu Motel, he teased Camus with a smile, "Have you been awake the entire time, squatting in the shadows outside the motel, observing my movements?

"That's tough. Careful not to suddenly drop dead."

If Camus hadn't known that Louis Berry had a close relationship with the Church of The Fool and didn't mind him tagging along, he would have thought Lumian's teasing was a warning.

Do you think I want that? Camus laughed self-deprecatingly.

"I'll be in charge of watching tonight. It's Maslow or Rhea's turn tomorrow."

Lumian didn't engage in further conversation. As if lost in thought,

he made his way back to the Brieu Motel.
Camus wanted to inquire further, but he dared not.
He then saw the adventurer stop at the motel's entrance, his back toward Camus. Lumian said calmly, "Before Twanaku died, he mentioned a term—Dream Festival.
"I've just discovered some traces in his house and confirmed that there's a special dream happening in Tizamo Town.
"Gather all the folklore related to dreams in this area and bring it to me as soon as possible."
"Uh..." Camus was at a loss at first, but then his mind cleared, as if a bucket of ice-cold water had been poured over him on a scorching summer day.
As expected, there's more to the Twanaku incident. There's indeed a huge problem lurking here! Camus wasn't too surprised, but his heart pounded.
Instinctively, he replied, "Okay."
After agreeing, Camus realized that he had unknowingly followed Lumian's instructions, as if the other man were the captain of a patrol team.
After watching Lumian enter the Brieu Motel, Camus briefly analyzed his reaction.
He felt that this situation stemmed from both the intimidation brought about by Lumian's strength and the accumulated credibility and reliability of his previous deeds.
I have to send a telegram back to Port Pylos to request reinforcements...
In addition, I need to familiarize myself with Tizamo as soon as possible and strive to move jurisdiction here within a few days...
After considering his next steps, Camus let out another sigh.
Ever since encountering Louis Berry, problems had never ceased erupting!
I initially came to Tizamo to monitor his actions and prevent any accidents. *Why am I now investigating the Dream Festival?*
...
Up in the suite on the second floor of the Brieu Motel, Lumian greeted Ludwig shuffling to the dining table, having just woken up. He then returned to the master bedroom.
Before pondering his letter to Madam Magician, Lumian noticed a folded square of paper on the desk.
A reply after midnight—so typical of Madam Magician, he thought with an inward chuckle. He picked up the letter and conjured a blazing white fireball above his head for light, as Tizamo lacked gas lighting.
Under the fireball's incandescent glow, Lumian unfolded and read

the letter:
"I've completed my astromancy and received a revelation about the rest of the Abscessed Hand's body.
"The remaining body is divided into three parts. One part is highly suspected to be located in the Underworld, and the other two parts have hints closely related to Lenburg's capital, Azshara, but they're not actually there. This reminds me of the City of Exiles, Morora, which seals 0-01. It has a similar situation, inside Lenburg, yet not truly being in Lenburg.
"My interpretation is that the two missing body parts of the Abscessed Hand are hidden away in the City of Exiles, Morora.
"Don't you find it too coincidental?
"No, it's not a coincidence at all. My astromancy results show that nearly three months ago, one of the two body parts was still located in the tombs of the Paz Kingdom in the Southern Continent, and the other part was related to some folklore in the south-central region.
"Get my drift?"
Wh— Almost three months ago... As a Conspirer, Lumian grasped Madam Magician's implication.
Accepting the information about the most terrifying Sealed Artifact 0-01, and masquerading as Ludwig's godfather, was akin to accepting an olive branch offered from the Church of Knowledge. Lumian had promised to pay a certain price for this knowledge...
It seemed the Church of Knowledge then dispatched high-ranking individuals to gather the two remaining body parts of the Abscessed Hand and hide them away in the City of Exiles, Morora.
What does this mean? It is clearly forcing me to journey to Morora, unless I choose to abandon my hopes of advancing to Sequence 4 and achieving the state of demi-godhood.
Heh heh, my agreement with the Abscessed Hand stated that until I found its full body, I would never be able to obtain true godhood. This blocks any idea of trying to become a demigod without consuming potions by relying on boons instead...
Thankfully, Lumian wasn't resistant to the idea of visiting the City of Exiles, Morora, before becoming a demigod. At that moment, he didn't feel stifled or vexed by this necessity. Instead, he felt it would actually save him a lot of trouble.
After some thought, he continued reading the rest of the letter:
"My astromancy results also tell me that once the Abscessed Hand's full body is gathered and reunited, something extremely dangerous will happen. It's best to complete this reunion step while you're in the City of Exiles, and use the existence of 0-01 to try to counteract this incoming risk.

"In other words, you need to find and retrieve the body part located in the Underworld first.
"Yes, you should have an opportunity to enter the Underworld itself within the next three months. Remember to seize this opportunity when it arises. Don't ask me what opportunity it is exactly—I don't know the specifics either."
Opportunity to enter the Underworld within the next three months... Lumian repeated this crucial piece of information to himself.
Amidst his elation, the words struck Lumian as peculiar. "Entering the Underworld" and "going to hell" were two distinct phrases that conveyed the same meaning. In this world, barring a small number of individuals, no one could readily accept the phrase "you have a chance to go to hell within three months." It was worth noting that many people would curse at each other, saying, "I wish you a swift descent into hell."
For the moment, Lumian didn't have time to ponder the opportunity to enter the Underworld. He burned Madam Magician's reply and jotted down his gains for the night and his guesses about the Dream Festival. He planned to send it to the Major Arcana card holder at noon the following day.
Although he couldn't shake the feeling that Madam Magician's "schedule" bore a resemblance to Franca's, he wasn't sure if it was convenient to send a letter at that time.
...
Northern Continent, Trier.
Winter sunlight poured through the glass, filling the living room with warmth that chased away the chill.
Franca lounged in the recliner, basking in the cozy glow with half-lidded eyes.
Suddenly, she sensed something and sat upright, pulling her legs in.
In the shadowy corner, a human skull made of pure glowing silver emerged. Pale white flames flickered in its vacant sockets.
Madame Hela's messenger... *Why is she contacting me?* Franca watched, puzzled, as the skull's jaws unhinged, releasing a single page that drifted towards her.
She snatched the letter and scanned it quickly.
"007 hasn't heard from you in four days. He wants to confirm you're okay."
Four days without checking the group... A dry chuckle escaped her lips.
What does this mean?
Early to bed and late to rise keeps the king fit to rule his realm! No

more morning courts!
In the early morning hours, Franca manned the radio transceiver while Jenna roamed outside, seizing her opportunity to act as a Witch.
Tap tap tap! Her first telegram in days.
"Shurima! Your emperor has returned!"
Before long, 007's telegram was tapped out by the analyzer-powered mechanical typewriter.
"Hidden Blade, where have you been?"
Ahem. Franca cleared her throat.
"Late nights breed ill health. Have you no loved ones?"
"Don't bring up such sad topics..."
"Hidden Blade, have you mastered the assassination arts—sundering heart and soul?"
"..."
Protests arose from the other members.
At length, 007's message arrived.
"I have the intel on the last incident. Let's meet to discuss.
"The higher-ups also approved the item swap for the story you proposed."
Franca blinked, startled.
"How long did that take? I'd forgotten all about it..."
After all, understanding that humanoid Sealed Artifact's tale was Lumian's curiosity, not hers.
007's resigned telegram:
"Bureaucracy inertia. Unavoidable for any large, established organization."
"Tell me about it!" Another member, Moon King's amused agreement clattered out. "Whether public or secret, they're all bound by red tape."
After arranging to meet 007 that night with the Moran Avigny intel and initial assassination plan, Franca rose with a stretch.
She jotted down the two tasks before performing a ritual to summon Lumian's messenger, Penitent Baynfel.
...
Southern Continent, Tizamo Town.
Lumian was just about to head to Hisoka's house for a nap when his messenger materialized from the shadows, delivering a letter.
After taking the note, Lumian noticed Penitent Baynfel didn't immediately depart back to the spirit world as usual. Instead, he lingered, surveying their surroundings with a measured gaze.

Chapter 666: New Information

Lumian had rarely seen Penitent Baynfel act so abnormally. He asked with anticipation and curiosity, "What have you discovered?"
Baynfel, clad in a clergyman's black robe, his charred body partially tainted by black flames, averted his gaze and replied in a deep voice, "The night conceals the flowing sin."
With that, the Penitent stepped into the void and vanished from the room.
The night conceals the flowing sin... It's emphasizing the night because that allows entry into the special dream? *What does the 'flowing sin' refer to?* Can't you mysterious types speak plainly? Lumian criticized, then opened Franca's letter and quickly read it.
To be honest, after such a long time, his desire to understand the humanoid Sealed Artifact's past had significantly diminished. After all, he had mainly felt the other party's state was similar to his own, triggering his emotions back then. That was why he had suggested it. Now, those emotions had long settled.
Of course, they had only settled, not disappeared. Lumian tore open the letter and jotted down the entire incident, planning to send it to Madam Magician at noon the next day.
As for whether the Major Arcana card holder would agree to such an unequal trade, Lumian wasn't too confident. However, he intuitively felt that the Tarot Club's Major Arcana holders wouldn't simply take possession of important artifacts from the orthodox Churches. Using this opportunity to make a deal was more likely.
After leaving the Brieu Motel, Lumian calmly observed Camus, donned in a yellow vest, emerge from a dimly lit street corner. Beside him was Rhea, a member of the local patrol wearing leather armor and carrying a hunting bow.
"Why two people today?" Lumian chuckled and strode towards Hisoka's house.
Camus took a deep breath to calm his sudden surge of emotions. As he followed Louis Berry's left hand, he replied in a deep voice, "There are only a few days left until the 17th. An accident might happen at any moment. We can't act alone anymore."
Having consciously gathered various information, the patrol team had already noticed some abnormalities. This made Camus feel that staying in Tizamo was unwise. He was constantly on edge.
He felt a growing sense of being a middle-aged man burdened with heavy responsibilities.
Raising an eyebrow, Lumian queried, "Hey, you figuring out the 17th is a key date was pretty fast."
"We're not fools," Camus finally couldn't help but reply. "It's an

obvious issue. Last year, Tizamo was attacked on December 17th, and in previous years..."
At this point, he fell silent.
He realized that when around Louis Berry, he constantly switched between his heavy middle-aged state and uncontrollable teenage emotions.
Lumian asked with interest, "What happened in previous years?"
Camus fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "We obtained the funeral registrations for nearly three decades in Tizamo from the Saint-Sien Cathedral and discovered a peculiar phenomenon. 80% of the annual deaths are recorded within the first three months starting mid-December.
"This place isn't like many Northern Continent places. Winters are bitterly cold there. It's difficult for the elderly and weak to survive. Even if they do, it's summer from late December to late March.
"This phenomenon is abnormal."
Lumian advanced slowly and nodded slightly.
"Is the mortality rate in Tizamo higher than elsewhere?"
"Significantly higher, but that's mainly due to attacks from the primitive forest tribe. Also, we discovered the tribe's attacks concentrated in the three months beginning mid-December. There have been two to three attacks annually, and since the one on December 17th last year, not a single one has occurred. The situation doesn't seem right." Camus was a little worried a major attack would occur in the next few days.
"Heh heh, it's understandable the tribe's attacks concentrated in those first three months. Any other abnormalities?" Lumian asked casually.
Rhea, who had been silently following, responded.
The brown-skinned, brown-haired woman, exuding a wild beauty, spoke in a raspy voice,
"In the first half of this year, many women in town and the plantations experienced symptoms of nausea, soreness, bloating—pregnancy symptoms. They believed they'd been victimized by a ghost and might birth evil fetuses, but they weren't actually pregnant. Just illusions. After Padre Cali held Mass and briefly purified them, they received psychological comfort and quickly returned to normal."
"We've also noticed similar incidents of perceived possession and attacks by evil spirits in Tizamo over the years, concentrated in that first half. It's not just pregnancy symptoms," Camus added.
Lumian halted in his tracks.
"Don't the townsfolk and the people in the surrounding plantations find it strange that mass hysteria occurs every year?"

As a member of the local patrol team, Rhea explained simply, "Everyone believes it's caused by the primitive tribe in the forest."
"Why?" Lumian resumed his nocturnal "stroll."
Rhea's vocal cords seemed damaged, and her voice was always a little hoarse.
"In the repeated attacks and conflicts, the primitive tribe displayed the ability to control corpses, ghosts, and shadows. Furthermore, some warriors seemed to continue protecting their tribe in their spirit form after their deaths."
Death domain... Heh, the entire matter seems logical on the surface. No wonder the Tizamons who left town didn't find anything amiss and didn't raise the issue... Lumian had seen records of the primitive tribe, but they weren't as specific as Rhea's description.
After inquiring about the recent information the patrol team had gathered, Lumian stopped in front of Hisoka's house and turned to glance at Rhea, who was carrying a hunting bow and arrows.
"You're from the Southern Continent, but not from Tizamo?"
Rhea nodded and calmly said, "I'm from the forest. I'm from one of the primitive tribes called Paca. We mainly live near the Paz Valley."
The rainforest of the Southern Continent spanned a vast expanse, encompassing numerous territories. From the area near the Paz Valley to the vicinity of Matani, the distance might be even greater than that between Cordu and Trier.
"Paca" meant "wind" in Dutanese.
"How did you come to Matani?" Lumian asked curiously.
Rhea let out a chuckle.
"I was sold here."
She paused for a moment before continuing, "Ten years ago, my tribe was attacked by the Loen Kingdom's army. I was captured and sold repeatedly before arriving in the Northern state. Later, I found a chance to escape and fled to Port Pylos. I received help from the Church and found work. Eventually, I was lucky enough to become a Beyonder."
The patrol team member calmly recounted her past, not dwelling on any pain or torture from those experiences, nor deliberately avoiding details.
No wonder you believe so devoutly in the Eternal Blazing Sun... Lumian ascended the stairs to the second floor and said in an even tone,
"Did you keep using a bow instead of firearms out of habit?"
"Yes. Tribes named for the wind excel at archery." Rhea's light-brown face softened.

Lumian glanced back at her.
"Did you ever go back to take a look?"
Rhea fell silent for a few seconds.
"They're all dead..."
Lumian and Camus retreated their gazes in silence as they climbed the final stairs and entered the second floor of the house.
Lumian surveyed the spacious yet rudimentary surroundings, listening to the wild roars from the primitive forest. He sat cross-legged.
He had intended to tell Rhea, "It's impossible for your entire tribe to be wiped out. Some must have been captured and sold like you. They could still be alive on plantations, in mines, or seedy bars." But he held back.
He could tell Rhea had accepted her current life and gained the ability to live better. It seemed inappropriate to encourage her to risk traversing both continents seeking potential remaining clansmen.
Just the thought of such an endeavor was daunting. With so few clues and them likely scattered far, it could prove quite dangerous. Even spending a lifetime, one might never complete it. Not everyone with a similar experience would sacrifice a normal life for vengeance or seeking others.
Rhea likely realized some clansmen survived, but perhaps those most important to her had perished. She chose to stay in Port Pylos.
Everyone makes their own choices. I can't ask the same of others just because of my own obsessions... Lumian composed himself and smiled at Camus and Rhea, who were still standing.
"Would you like to explore the potential venue for the Dream Festival?"
"Where?" Rhea blurted out.
Camus furrowed his brow.
"Here?"
Quickly making a guess, he asked, "Do you come here every night to sleep and access the Dream Festival's location? Is it in a special dream?"
Quite smart... Lumian praised Camus inwardly for his quick thinking, but his smile remained unwavering.
"Care to experience it?"
Camus and Rhea exchanged glances and agreed, "I'll experience it. Rhea, keep an eye on the surroundings."
"I can set some traps," Lumian offered. He stood up and spent a few minutes setting up warning traps nearby.
Afterward, he lit a mosquito repellent candle, placing it in the

middle of the spacious second floor.
Mosquitoes that hadn't flown away landed on the ground, emitting flames and smoke amidst crackling sounds.
"Sleep here," Lumian instructed Camus and Rhea as he sat cross-legged again.
He had confirmed that sleeping anywhere in Hisoka's house at night allowed him to enter the special dream. Sleeping outside or sleeping two hours earlier didn't have the same effect.
Perplexed, Camus and Rhea found seats and leaned against different wooden pillars, attempting to enter a deep slumber.
After an unknown period of time, Camus suddenly woke up.
Before him was the night and the crimson moonlight outside the window. Louis Berry stood behind the flickering mosquito repellent candle, wearing a golden straw hat. The adventurer playfully remarked, "Welcome to the Dream Festival."

Chapter 667: Approaching Gentleness

Camus's nerves tensed as he propped himself up on his left hand, surveying his surroundings warily.

He realized he was still on the second floor of Twanaku's house. Rhea, who had been leaning against a wooden pillar, stood up in a daze.

Everything around him seemed no different from before he had fallen asleep.

"Are you joking?" Camus asked Louis Berry cautiously.

What kind of Dream Festival is this?

This feels like a normal awakening after a nap!

Lumian turned and pointed out the window.

"Listen to the forest sounds."

Camus and Rhea instinctively listened, realizing that the nearby forest was eerily silent, as if all its inhabitants had fallen asleep in the night.

Wh— Rhea's eyes narrowed.

Born and raised in the primitive forest and having lived in Tizamo Town for nearly a year, she knew the forest wouldn't be in such absolute silence.

Lumian pointed at the floor beside the mosquito repellent candle.

"Look here again."

Camus and Rhea looked over, realizing that the mosquito corpses that should have been there were gone.

Lumian chuckled.

"Of course, you can also believe that I woke up early, cleaned up the environment, and secretly affected your hearing of distant voices. All of this was just a prank."

Camus pondered for a few seconds.

"I'm inclined to believe you, but I need to confirm something."

"Indeed," Rhea chimed in, carrying a hunting bow and arrows.

Lumian looked at them and nodded slightly. He calmly concluded, I can now determine that the reason I remain conscious in this peculiar dream stems from a hidden power within Hisoka's house, not any special traits of my own.

He had invited Camus and Rhea to slumber in Hisoka's house and enter the special dream not merely to share information with the patrol team and gather a few aides.

No, it was also an experiment to uncover key details!

Over the past few days, Lumian had conducted numerous similar trials, grasping the dream's nuanced patterns like a seasoned explorer mapping uncharted lands.

With hands tucked nonchalantly in his pockets, he trailed behind

Camus and Rhea, who hurried downstairs. He wanted to witness how they would confirm whether this was indeed a dream.
After departing Twanaku's house, the two patrol members rushed to the nearest townsperson's abode.
Upon realizing the livestock had vanished from the ground floor, Rhea swiftly ascended to the second story and attempted to unlock the door with a simple iron-black key.
Camus opened his mouth as if to dissuade her, but in the end, remained silent.
Observing this, Lumian nodded thoughtfully and muttered to himself, A Beyonder of the Arbiter pathway will subconsciously maintain the current order, unwilling to disrupt its fabric. If such Beyonders also bear official identities, this tendency only intensifies...
Rhea rapped upon the door and entered the dwelling. She and Camus scoured each room, but the resident family had seemingly evaporated into thin air.
Then, the pair made their way to the police station near the Saint-Sien Cathedral's hallowed grounds.
The local patrol quarters held five rooms in total.
Kolobo, Maslow, and Loban were nowhere to be found, nor were the two officers meant to stand the night watch.
"I now believe this is a dream," Camus declared to Louis Berry, who leisurely trailed with hands tucked in pockets, a golden straw hat shading his features. "Yet I'm so utterly awake that it defies the very notion of a dream."
Before Lumian could respond, Rhea's light-brown face furrowed slightly.
"When I ran down the street and searched these rooms, it felt a little... familiar."
"Familiar?" Lumian asked calmly, his brows unfurrowed.
Could there be unexpected gains from this experiment?
Rhea pondered for a moment.
"I think I've had a similar dream before."
"In my dream, it was just as dark and quiet. The streets were empty, and I was alone. I ran around, searching..."
"Was it a mere fragment or a complete dream?" Lumian pressed.
Rhea thought for a few seconds.
"I don't know. I only remember a few such scenes."
"Do you often dream of this, or only occasionally?" Lumian guided her to confirm the details.
Rhea replied with certainty, "Occasionally."
"Occasionally..."
Even if the Tizamo residents don't slumber here on a specific date,

they can occasionally enter this peculiar dream, yet remain unable to stay awake. Like a normal dream?
Perhaps it's not true immersion, but rather an unconscious development spiritually spawned from the crimson moon and other environmental elements, allowing them to vaguely interact.
Unfortunately, Rhea clearly doesn't recall the moon, weather, and other situational details from those dreams. If I could employ Dream Divination, I could aid her recollection...
The few Tizamons I queried in Port Pylos made no mention of such dreams. Firstly, dreams so ordinary often slip the mind. Secondly, they've been away from Tizamo for years... As Lumian's thoughts raced, he turned to Camus to see if the Interrogator had any queries.
Camus pondered for a moment before asking Rhea, "What do you think is special about the residents of Tizamo?"
Very perceptive. Since this dream seems to affect the entire town and surrounding area, it's likely these people will display some abnormality in waking life... Lumian nodded inwardly.
Rhea thought for a moment.
"Nothing special. It's just that they're very... obedient."
At this, Rhea sighed.
"They're extremely polite to others. Gentle personalities, stable emotions, very obedient. Even when angered, they quickly calm down. When trouble arises, they tend to let the authorities handle it instead of fighting amongst themselves or causing public disturbances..."
These were all situations Lumian had heard Camus mention and seen in the corresponding intel. On the surface, nothing seemed amiss. It was a state of being tamed.
Rhea added, "Their only issue is a lack of enthusiasm. It's not that politeness masks an underlying coldness or hatred. They're simply... unenthusiastic, as if reluctant to openly display emotion."
Upon hearing this, Lumian recalled the Tizamons he'd interacted with over the past few days.
Apart from some gentlemen and ladies from the Northern Continent, the others were calm, gentle, and disinclined to argue. They always communicated politely.
Immediately after, he recalled the Tizamons questioned in Port Pylos—fear, worry, ingratiating expressions, vivid emotions.
Clearly different from the Tizamo townspeople!
Most of their emotions have been drawn away into the dream? Lumian finally pinpointed an abnormality about the Tizamons.
Their issue clearly didn't stem solely from attacks by the primitive forest tribe!

Upon hearing Lumian's guess, Camus couldn't help but hiss.
"I knew it. The Tizamons feel... strange. Too docile. Even livestock occasionally grow agitated, resists... Could the reason be..."
Rhea's heart skipped a beat as she said solemnly, voice laced with fear, "I've been here nearly a year, and I feel much gentler...
"My most intense emotions haven't dissipated. They're still in my heart, but most of the time, it's as if I'm... asleep..."
Rhea began analyzing herself. "From the looks of it, everyone in Tizamo will gradually be affected by this peculiar dream. After leaving, they can slowly escape its influence." Lumian glanced at Camus. "For outsiders like us, who've only been here a few days, there's no issue for now. Perhaps we'll also become unnaturally gentle if we linger too long."
Without waiting for Camus's response, Lumian inquired, "When will reinforcements from the patrol team and Admiral Guard arrive?"
At the mention of this, Camus's expression soured. He gritted his teeth and cursed, "Those selfish bastards! It's very likely there won't be much support."
"The Admiral Guard said they already have a Beyonder team here and an army. Only Captain Reaza expressed backing for the patrol team. Dammit, those dogsh*t!"
Lumian was taken aback for a moment before bursting into laughter. The newly formed organization under the aboriginal admiral was indeed different from the official Northern Continent organizations.
If this were the Eternal Blazing Sun Church or Church of Earth Mother, the official Beyonders would have already devised a plan and dispatched sufficient force to resolve the issue. They'd be prepared to obliterate Tizamo if anything went awry.
The current situation is Admiral Querarill believes that with me—a famed adventurer backed by the Church of The Fool, here—I'm able to use its power to resolve Tizamo's troubles. Is there a need to send more Beyonder subordinates to aid me?
That's true. Beyonders aren't commodities. If too many powerful ones perish, not only will Admiral Querarill feel the strain, but he won't be able to effectively rule Matani...
Recruitment alone can't quickly fill such a gap, and they won't be quick to trust newcomers. Even nurturing the remaining people with the retrieved Beyonder characteristics poses huge problems. Low-Sequence Beyonders are manageable, but Mid-Sequence advancement carries high failure risk. After all, most here haven't mastered the acting method... Lumian quickly grasped Admiral Querarill's mentality.

He said to the agitated Camus, "Let me show you around this dream realm and provide an introduction."
"Alright." Camus took a deep breath.
He and Rhea followed Lumian through the dark, silent, vacant town.
After a long while, Lumian led the two patrol members into the primitive forest. He informed them he'd seen Twanaku's image in the chaotic zone ahead, seemingly composed of dream fragments. He suspected there was a Desire Apostle mark present.
Walking amongst the trees, giants in the night, Camus felt increasingly oppressed.
Before he could inquire about Twanaku's image details, he suddenly heard a bowstring drawn taut.
Pa!
An arrow, entwined with lightning, flew from afar. Camus dodged just in time as it grazed past, piercing into a rubber tree behind him amidst crackling lightning and charred bark. Lumian, Camus, and Rhea gazed into the distance, spotting a woman standing on a huge tree branch.
The woman wore dark leather armor, holding a hunting bow and arrows. Her brown hair was tied in two strands draped over her shoulders.
Her light brown skin and wild, beautiful face couldn't hide the coldness and hatred behind her eyes.
Rhea!
It was Rhea!

Chapter 668: Dream Person?

Rhea gazed at the figure perched on the tree branch, a surreal scene playing out before her like a dream. Correction: This was a dream.

The other Rhea's frigid expression masked a deep-seated hatred as she drew the bowstring once more, causing the arrow to crackle with silver lightning.

As Lumian contemplated teleporting behind Rhea on the tree to probe her control in this eerily realistic dream and question her about her apparent "knowledge" of the situation, his surroundings quivered and fragmented into disjointed scenes.

The scenes overlapped and promptly shattered.

Simultaneously, Lumian, Rhea, and Camus opened their eyes. Crimson moonlight spilled through the window, accompanied by the primal roars of wild beasts from the nearby forest.

They found themselves still on the second floor of Hisoka's house.

Camus jolted upright, eyeing the mosquito repellent candle that had burned out, leaving behind a mere stub. Charred mosquito corpses littered the area.

"Are we awake? Have we returned to reality?" Camus questioned, uncertainty clouding his expression.

Leaning against a wooden pillar, Lumian chuckled.

"That should be the case, but I won't claim we're 100% out of the dream.

"We'll need to verify through various details in the coming period."

The simplest method involved checking Ludwig's whereabouts and state.

Although asking Termiboros could provide an accurate answer, there was no guarantee the fellow would answer or respond truthfully.

Camus nodded, his gaze shifting to Rhea, who had remained silent since waking up. After a brief pause, he spoke.

"We seem to have witnessed another version of you at the dream's boundary."

Another Rhea, embodying entirely different emotions and states.

Rhea stayed silent for a moment before admitting, "I saw it too.

"She appears much like the intense emotions I mentioned earlier—the ones slumbering in my heart."

Lumian adjusted his golden straw hat, standing up on his own legs. He spoke thoughtfully, "Could that dream absorb the intense emotions in Tizamo and give rise to the corresponding Dream Person—an even more extreme and emotional entity?"

"So, the longer one stays in Tizamo, the more subdued they

become," Camus concurred with Louis Berry's hypothesis, and Rhea nodded in agreement.
Mirror People... Dream People... How many peculiar entities lingered in the shadows of this world? Lumian massaged his temples and strode towards the stairs leading to the surface.
"That concludes tonight's attempt," he casually declared.
Camus and Rhea followed closely, confirming their escape from the dream through the return of livestock and the commotion in the house.
They waited until Lumian entered the Brieu Motel before halting, concealing themselves in the shadows diagonally opposite.
...
Lumian pushed open the door to the suite, spotting Ludwig at the dining table, devouring a roasted banana with gusto. In his other hand, he wielded a child's fork, delving into a special salad crafted from the heart of a palm tree.
Observing this, Lumian was certain that this wasn't a dream.
He cast a glance at Lugano, who was dozing off, and nonchalantly inquired of Ludwig, "Do you dream when you sleep?"
Despite being occupied, Ludwig replied, "Yes."
Lumian nodded thoughtfully.
"Have you had any dreams in the past few days?"
Taking a moment between bites of grilled river fish, Ludwig responded, "Yes."
"What dreams did you have?" Lumian removed his golden straw hat, stowing it back into his Traveler's Bag.
Ludwig replied with a muffled voice, "Eat, eat, eat..."
Indeed, I shouldn't expect much... Lumian chuckled self-deprecatingly and turned his attention to Lugano.
"What dreams did you have?"
Is there something wrong with the dreams here? Lugano contemplated asking but decided to answer truthfully.
"All kinds of dreams..."
He paused before adding, "Perhaps it's been too long since I went out alone. Haha, I didn't have a chance to release my pent-up emotions. Occasionally, I'd dream of women and such matters, only to realize that something was amiss. Either the target transformed into a monster, or the initially alluring woman was covered in tree warts, wheat, and mushrooms... Then, I'd wake up in shock."
As an Intisian, he had no reservations discussing such topics.
According to the psychology taught by Anthony, your pent-up desires and fear of the dangers in Tizamo are a mix of unresolved factors... Lumian commented inwardly and smiled.

"You can explore the Giant Boa bar alone, find a local lady, or mingle with the ladies and maids in the plantation outside. As long as you ensure food for Ludwig, he'll manage on his own."
Initially, Lugano's heart raced, but the potential dangers outside soon came to mind.
Lumian headed towards the master bedroom, leaving a parting sentence with a smile.
"Of course, I can't guarantee those ladies won't turn into monsters or undergo anomalies after your little adventure."
"..." Lugano couldn't help but shudder at the imagined scenario.
He glanced at Ludwig, finding comfort in staying by the boy's side.
Until all the stored food was consumed, he considered himself safe!
...
In the shadows diagonally opposite the Brieu Motel, Rhea observed in silence for a while before suddenly speaking up.
"Since there won't be any new reinforcements from the Admiral Guard, and only Deputy Captain Reaza will come from the patrol team, why didn't you leave Tizamo directly? Why did you stay here and attempt to resolve the Dream Festival problem?"
As long as he escaped Matani, the Admiral Guard and patrol team wouldn't have the resources to track and punish them. At most, they could issue a wanted poster, but they wouldn't be able to pay a high bounty.
Camus scratched his disheveled brown hair, smiling wryly.
"As you know, my previous Sequence was a Public Security Officer. It tied seamlessly with the patrol team's usual work, making me yearn to maintain order in Matani and safeguard the lives of the people here.
"The potion not only brings strength but also affects you in many ways."
He exhaled and continued, "Besides, Captain Reaza is about to arrive. I have to help him. I have to repay what I owe him."
Camus didn't disclose another reason: his confidence in the adventurer Louis Berry and the Church of The Fool behind him. He believed that with Louis Berry present, the situation would be threatening but not perilous.
Rhea didn't press further, continuing to gaze diagonally at the Brieu Motel.
Camus glanced at her.
"What about you? Why don't you leave Tizamo with Loban and the others now? The three of you can form a team. Some local admirals will be willing to take you in."
Rhea's eyes remained fixed on Louis Berry's suite as she stayed

silent.
After a prolonged silence, just as Camus thought she wouldn't answer, Rhea suddenly spoke.
"When I was in the most pain and despair, it was the Church who helped me. After that, it was the patrol team who gave me a new beginning and a new life."
Recalling the cold Rhea's face filled with hatred in the dream, Camus sighed sincerely and said, "It hasn't been easy for you."
The moment he finished speaking, Rhea sneered.
"You're the most contradictory person I've ever encountered. In the past, I've often heard you talk about which states and islands the Feynapotter Kingdom should invade, which mines and valleys they should seize, and how they should establish more colonies in the Southern Continent. But now, you're showing pity towards me.
"I can sense your sincerity. You genuinely feel pain for me, but that's why I can't help but want to say something."
Camus found himself at a loss for words.
Indeed, it was a contradiction.
He also realized that Rhea's emotions had become even more turbulent after encountering herself in the dream. She seemed more willing to open up.
Could this be the result of encountering extreme emotions? Or perhaps those who hadn't spent more than a year in Tizamo might resist the dream's influence to some extent if they grasped the truth of "obedience"? Camus quickly thought of the plantations outside the town and individuals like Sir Petit, Miss Amandina, Monsieur Robert, and the others.
These gentlemen and ladies weren't easily subdued.
The special dream had evidently encompassed both the out-of-town plantation and the garrison barracks.
Camus figured out the reason: These gentlemen and ladies spent at least half their time in Port Pylos each year.
This also explained why he was familiar with them.
...
At noon the next day, shortly after Lumian dispatched the letter, he received a prompt reply from Madam Magician:
"Did the Eternal Blazing Sun Church present this price, or was it your offer?
"Can a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact be exchanged for such trifles?
"If I didn't know the kind of person you are, I would suspect that you concealed more than half of the offer from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.
"In addition to the information related to this Grade 1 Sealed Artifact, ensure the Eternal Blazing Sun Church provides an

additional 50,000 pounds worth of gold at the highest exchange rate in the past three months.
"Don't worry, gold is the last thing they need."
Gold worth 50,000 pounds... That's approximately 1.2 million verl d'or worth of gold. Why would Madam Magician require such a substantial amount of gold? Recalling the importance of gold in mysticism, the Armored Shadow's need to reconstruct its golden body, and the widespread use of gold in Death-related domains, he swiftly arrived at a realization.
A subtle detail caught his attention.
Madam Magician used the Loen Kingdom's gold pound to express the value of gold.
Does this imply her recent activity in the Loen Kingdom? Lumian nodded thoughtfully, considering whether to summon Jenna's messenger, Rabbit Chasel, to convey Madam Magician's request, or to return to Trier personally for discussions on the Dream Festival with Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.

Chapter 669: Connivance

Recalling Franca's meeting with 007 tonight to discuss dealing with Moran Avigny, Lumian decided to summon Jenna's messenger, Rabbit Chasel, as he had to return to Trier tomorrow to discuss the division of labor and specific details.

After jotting down Madam Magician's request and folding it, Lumian set up a ritual, allowing the special Rabbit of Knowledge to emerge from the candle's flames.

The first thing Lumian noticed was the miniature half top hat snugly perched between the rabbit's ears. Next, he saw gold-rimmed glasses and a black trench coat that matched the vaguely rabbit-shaped creature's size. Finally, an iron-black revolver lay in the rabbit's palm.

The revolver gleamed with a metallic luster, its barrel unusually thick, and its cylinder unnaturally large and textured. It stood in stark contrast to the illusory appearance of the top hat, trench coat, and gold-rimmed glasses.

Upon seeing Rabbit Chasel, Lumian raised his eyebrows.

"Is this a real gun?"

Hidden behind the gold-rimmed glasses, Rabbit Chasel's eyes sharpened.

"Yes."

"Did Jenna customize it for you?" Lumian inquired.

Rabbit Chasel replied succinctly, "It's payment."

Quite a cold demeanor... Miss Celia Bello, have you considered the consequences of what you've done? You haven't! Because I don't know the consequences either unless I consult Madam Magician... Lumian criticized inwardly before handing the folded letter to Rabbit Chasel.

Seeing the human-like, rabbit-shaped creature preparing to turn and walk into the candle flame, Lumian, the Prankster King of Cordu, asked with interest, "Can you shoot?"

Rabbit Chasel fell silent for a moment, as if embarrassed.

"Not yet."

Oh, you're not as cold as Gehrman Sparrow anymore... Lumian chuckled and said, "Jenna and I are friends. I'll help her pay the postage fee this time.

"Do you want to learn shooting? It involves knowledge and guidance."

Rabbit Chasel, taller than an ordinary rabbit, replied without hesitation, "Sure thing."

Lumian's smile broadened.

After finding a secluded spot at the edge of the primitive forest and

earnestly teaching Rabbit Chasel how to shoot for a considerable time, Lumian strolled back to Tizamo with his hands in his pockets, planning to visit the only café for afternoon tea.
The café bore the name "Bunia" after its owner, a man named Bunia.
He was under the age of 30. Having once served as a waiter and apprentice at a café in Port Pylos, Bunia, recalling the lack of a proper café in Tizamo Town, transformed the ground floor of his house into a semi-open café.
Lumian, weaving through the tables and chairs on the street, arrived at the kitchen counter, offering a smile to the proprietor and waiter, Bunia.
"Do you have Fermo coffee?"
Bunia's brown skin, not too dark, and his features resembling those of mixed blood, showcased his Tizamon heritage.
The man in his late twenties responded with an honest smile in fluent Intisian.
"Monsieur, there's no Fermo coffee."
Lumian, intending to playfully inquire, casually switched to a cup of Corsa coffee from Matani.
Sipping the bitter and sweet liquid at a table, he noticed Camus, adorned in a vest, and Rhea, clad in leather armor, entering the café. Each ordered an Intis coffee and a corn nutcake imbued with Tizamo flair.
Upon spotting Rhea, the single Bunia became even more bashful and busier, avoiding eye contact.
As Camus and Rhea, equipped with their coffee and corn nutcakes, sought a spot, Lumian raised his arm in greeting.
As Camus and Rhea reluctantly settled into their seats across from him, Lumian inquired with a smile, "Why do you look so tired?"
Glancing at the energetic adventurer, Camus took a deep breath and slowly exhaled.
"We just finished work. We can finally rest."
Yesterday, he had monitored the Brieu Motel late into the night!
"All I want now is a good night's sleep." After exploring the dream together last night, Rhea wasn't as reticent as before when facing Lumian.
"Then why are you still drinking coffee?" Lumian replied with amusement.
It was evident that Rhea and Camus lacked the energy of a Sleepless.
"I want to endure until dinner before sleeping," Camus said with a sigh.
Rhea shook her head.

"Coffee is useless to me."
After a brief chat, Rhea finished her corn nutcake and coffee, then headed back to the nearby police headquarters to rest. Camus continued to recline in the armchair, occasionally taking a sip of coffee.
"Has Reaza arrived?" Lumian inquired with a smile.
Camus fell silent for a moment.
"He's here. Tonight, one of the two—Maslow and Loban—will be following you with him."
As for Kolobo, there was no need for him to be on duty. If he didn't even dare to look, how could he do any monitoring?
While they conversed, Lumian noticed Miss Amandina from Palm Manor leading a short unicorn outside the Bunia café, exuding high spirits.
The blue-eyed girl was clad in off-white hunting attire today, her black hair fashioned into a half-height bun.
After entrusting the whip and reins to the brown-skinned valet, she strolled to the kitchen counter with her lady's maid, who also bore an Intisian appearance.
Along the way, she cheerfully greeted the patrons in the café and exchanged pleasantries with the locals sipping on inexpensive coffee.
Observing Camus's gaze fixed on the girl, Lumian teased, "Do you wish to engage in a duel with her fiancé?"
"No, I'm not that kind of person," Camus replied with a serious expression. "I admit that she's indeed very attractive to me, but she's already engaged to Monsieur Robert. This is a sign that she's starting a family. I can't allow myself to destroy someone else's family."
You Feynapotterians... Lumian didn't mock him but sighed with emotion.
Such values appealed to Feynapotter.
Of course, not every Feynapotterian possessed such values.
Seeing Lumian's lack of response, Camus said seriously, "Don't have any ideas about her."
Lumian regarded the young man surnamed Castiya with amusement, awaiting further "explanation."
Camus furrowed his brow slightly.
"I know you Intisians won't back down just because the other party has a fiancé or a husband. You might find it even more exciting, but you always pursue momentary pleasure. Very few are willing to take responsibility. You always satisfy yourself. When you're happy, you turn around and leave, leaving a lady to face everything that's been destroyed."

"Not every Intisian is like this," Lumian shook his head with a smile.
But most Trieriens are like that... However, neither party is innocent in such matters... he added inwardly.
The energetic and playful Amandina led the lady's maid past Camus and Lumian's table.
First, she greeted Camus, then sized up Lumian and said candidly, "I'm Amandina. What about you?"
"Louis Berry," Lumian replied with a smile.
Amandina nodded and suddenly laughed.
"You must have just arrived from Trier. You're different from the people here."
"No, I'm from a village in the south," Lumian switched to Intisian with a Dariège accent.
Amandina wasn't disappointed. She happily inquired about the folklore of the southern provinces of the Intis Republic before leading the lady's maid to a table in the corner.
Camus watched as the two of them conversed. He opened his mouth but closed it again.
...
Trier, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.
Jenna was curled up on the sofa, engrossed in the novels she had just bought, all with elements of Witches. Suddenly, Rabbit Chasel appeared in front of her and handed her a letter.
Observing the bizarre yet adorable rabbit-shaped creature, Jenna opened the letter and scanned its contents before asking earnestly, "Do you wish to select your payment, or shall I choose a random book for you?"
"Lumian Lee has already settled the payment on your behalf," Rabbit Chasel said in a deep yet sincere voice.
Witch Jenna suddenly felt a sense of foreboding.
"What has he paid?"
"He imparted shooting-related knowledge to me and guided me through the initial stage of my practice," Rabbit Chasel raised the special revolver in his hand, briefly aimed it at the door behind Jenna, and then swiftly lowered it.
Wh— Monsieur Lumian Lee, have you considered the consequences of what you've done? Jenna chided, feeling a mix of irritation and amusement.
However, the deed was done, and she was powerless to reverse it.
As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jenna's lips curved into a sweet smile.
"The next payment will be for a genuine underarm holster. And after that, custom-made bullets with special effects. How does that

sound?"
Behind his glass glasses, Rabbit Chasel's eyes sparkled.
"Alright!"
...
In Tizamo Town, night had already fallen, and darkness shrouded the area.
Lumian stood in Hisoka's house, glancing at the stern vice-captain of the Port Pylos patrol team, Reaza, and the local patrol team leader, Maslow, whose face was adorned with white paint. As though instructing Lugano, he said, "Watch out for any accidents."
This time, he spoke in Dutanese.
"Alright." It wasn't the first time Maslow had accompanied Louis Berry, the great adventurer, and he was already accustomed to his style.
Dressed in a sleek formal suit, Reaza remained silent, signaling that there was no issue.
Lumian retrieved the brown Mystery Prying Glasses from his Traveler's Bag.
Tonight, his first task was to use this magical item to observe Hisoka's house from various angles, hoping to unveil the source of its abnormality.
After confirming his condition and preparations, Lumian placed the brown gold-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose.
A familiar wave of dizziness washed over Lumian, as if his surroundings had been disrupted and reassembled.
He witnessed poisonous insects crawling in the "sky," two walls that seemed to dance in circles, and an underground water puddle deep in the soil that appeared to absorb all light.

Chapter 670: Sudden Arrival

Amidst the dizzying sensation that threatened to separate his spirit from his body, Lumian saw trees that seemed to slumber in the darkness and a pitch-black boulder...

Finally, he removed the brown glasses from his nose and arched his back slightly to alleviate the discomfort.

Even an Ascetic wouldn't be able to use the Mystery Prying Glasses for long.

Of course, this ensured his safety to a certain degree.

Through this "prying," Lumian confirmed two things.

First, the area beneath Hisoka's house was indeed unusual, but it seemed more like an illusory symbol than an actual entity. It indicated that this place had once been corrupted or influenced, with the most severe occurrence taking place underground.

Second, this influence was connected to the black boulder deep within the primitive forest.

"How did it go?" Maslow, his face painted white, asked.

Lumian stored the Mystery Prying Glasses back into his Traveler's Bag and smiled.

"The abnormality I 'saw' here originates from a black boulder deep in the primitive forest. Have you ever seen or heard of that black boulder?"

The pale-white Reaza and Maslow, his black hair falling over his shoulders, shook their heads in unison, indicating a negative answer.

Lumian wasn't in a rush to do the second thing he had planned for the night. He glanced at Reaza, who was wearing a thin formal suit and appeared to be a mix of Intisian and West Balam heritage. He casually said, "I thought that with your arrival, some people in Tizamo would gradually leave and stay in Port Pylos for a while.

"As you know, the Dream Festival should start within three days."

Reaza calmly replied, "Based on my experience, except for those who have only arrived in Tizamo in the past two weeks, it's best not to leave this place and go elsewhere to prevent any abnormalities from spreading.

"It should only be considered after the Dream Festival ends and the primitive tribe launches another attack."

Very standardized process... I thought you would consider the opinions of Intis, Feynapotter, and other Northern Continent countries, allowing people with corresponding nationalities to evacuate in advance and protect them. For example, the owners of the plantations outside the city and their families... Yes, this is likely because the Dream Festival has never shown direct harm. It

only caused some townsfolk to suffer from hysteria and attracted an attack from the forest's primitive tribe. The first situation could be resolved by a simple Mass. The second problem could be guarded against and fended off... Lumian roughly understood the mentality of Admiral Querarill and the patrol team's leaders.
Since there wouldn't be any major issues, they would act as if the Dream Festival didn't exist, merely advising the local official Beyonders to be vigilant and guard against any mishaps while hoping that the Church of The Fool could resolve the hidden dangers!
If they were to do more, they might trigger something and worsen the situation.
After discussing the matter, Lumian recovered from the discomfort caused by the Mystery Prying Glasses. He took out the unique Eye of Truth and placed it in front of his face.
The relatively handsome Southern Continent native's eyelids twitched at the sight of the pale-white flesh, dark blood vessel-like earmuff and spectacle temple, as well as the blood-colored lens intertwined with transparent purple tubes.
How many glasses does Louis Berry own?
Moreover, each one is a mystical item!
After donning the single-lens Eye of Truth, Lumian surveyed his surroundings, seeking to uncover the truth behind reality.
As he did so, a voice gradually sounded in his ears, growing louder and more chaotic.
Each note and word seemed to materialize, flooding into Lumian's mind.
It made him feel as if his head was rapidly expanding like a balloon.
If the balloon continued to expand, there would only be one outcome: bursting with a resounding bang!
Lumian reached for his ear, ready to remove the Eye of Truth at any moment. He seized the opportunity to scrutinize Hisoka's house.
He believed that it was safer to take the risk of prying into the house's secrets before the Dream Festival, while not inside the special dream. It was safer than using the Eye of Truth and Mystery Prying Glasses within the dream itself.
Through the purple lens, Lumian couldn't discern much of the truth. Everything appeared similar to what he could see with his naked eye, but the night seemed even darker.
Without hesitation, his eye bulged, and blood vessels appeared on his body. He abruptly removed the Eye of Truth, and a slightly sharp explosion reverberated in his ears.

Phew, phew... Panting heavily, Lumian's mind was in disarray, overwhelmed by a barrage of strange knowledge. He couldn't think straight.
At that moment, even if someone were to ambush him, he wouldn't be able to react quickly.
After more than ten seconds, Lumian finally regained his ability to think clearly. He instinctively organized the knowledge that had been forcefully injected into his mind.
"The art of sophistry...
"How to cultivate superior wheat seeds...
"Canning techniques...
"How to roast pork that's crispy on the outside and tender on the inside...
"Music to soothe a sow's emotions...
"The Revelation of Evernight...
"Favorite Positions of Celebrities—Memoirs of Those Mistresses"
"..."
What's all this nonsense? Can't there be any useful knowledge? In the past, although Aurore had been tormented by the Hidden Sage's instillation of knowledge, she had at least stumbled upon valuable mysticism insights. Wait, had she also been corrupted by such knowledge? Is that why she always portrays a rich theoretical understanding in her books... Lumian rubbed his still throbbing head and said to Reaza and Maslow, "I'm going to the edge of the forest to take a look. Do you want to come with me?"
Reaza nodded, stingy with his words, while Maslow made his stance clear by walking towards the stairs.
If Camus were here, he would undoubtedly smile wryly and say, "Do I have a choice?" Lumian mused to himself. He left Hisoka's house and made his way towards the primitive forest near Tizamo Town.
After crossing the intersection and arriving at another street, Lumian noticed a four-wheeled, four-seater carriage parked at the entrance of the Brieu Motel.
An attendant and a lady's maid stepped out of the carriage, carrying their luggage, and followed a man and a woman towards the motel.
The man was attired in a dark-gray formal suit and a half top hat. His complexion resembled that of someone from the Northern Continent, and his side profile was well-defined, with striking dark green eyes. The woman wore a light-
colored dress that allowed for ease of movement and a feathered hat adorned with pearls. She appeared to be in her late twenties, and her skin was delicate and radiant. One would easily determine

that she was a beauty just from glimpsing her side profile.
Lumian averted his gaze and turned to Reaza and Maslow.
"Is it the weekend?"
"No," Maslow replied, understanding the implication behind Louis Berry's question. "Gentlemen and ladies often find time to hunt in Tizamo, not just on weekends."
Lumian turned to Reaza and inquired, "You didn't seal off this area?"
"That would only cause unnecessary panic," Reaza responded succinctly.
Lumian didn't press the matter further. He walked out of the town through the Brieu Motel and ventured into the primitive forest.
He delved deeper along the path he had become familiar with from the dream.
Finally, he arrived at the chaotic zone in reality, where various dream fragments intertwined.
It was an unremarkable place, indistinguishable from its surroundings.
Lumian found a palm tree and sat down. He turned to Reaza and Maslow and said, "Keep an eye on my surroundings. I'm going to sleep here."
He wanted to see what would happen if he fell asleep closer to the source of the abnormality, if he could enter that peculiar dream, and in what state.
Receiving affirmative responses from the two patrol team members, Lumian closed his eyes and attempted Cogitation.
At some point, he drifted off to sleep.
After an unknown period, he awoke.
Catching sight of Reaza and Maslow, Lumian rose to his feet and nodded thoughtfully.
This place doesn't work either... *Is Hisoka's house the only effective location?*
Or should I find that black boulder and sleep near it?
Lumian gazed into the pitch-black forest, contemplating for a few moments before turning to Reaza and Maslow.
"Let's head back."
The trio swiftly returned to Tizamo.
The late night had settled in, and the streets were devoid of any passersby. No lights or sounds emanated from the houses on either side. Occasionally, the snorts of livestock on the ground floor of the buildings could be heard, accentuating the pervading darkness and silence. The dim crimson moon's light seemed to emphasize the depths of the darkness.
On this dark night, Lumian walked along a muddy road, heading

towards the Brieu Motel situated deep within the street. Reaza and Maslow followed quietly behind him.
Suddenly, Lumian's mind spun, and his vision momentarily blurred before clearing.
This is... His pupils dilated as he instinctively scanned his surroundings but found nothing amiss.
At that moment, in a vacant house on the ground floor diagonally ahead, a dim candlelight illuminated a room on the third floor.
Immediately after, glass windows on this street and throughout Tizamo Town were set aglow by the light of burning candles.
...
Rhea awoke to find that darkness had already descended, but the candles in many houses continued to burn.
This indicated that it wasn't too late.
Feeling lazy, Rhea had no desire to prepare her own food. Carrying her bow and arrows, she left the room and exited the police headquarters from the side, making her way towards the nearby Bunia café.
The streets were nearly deserted, as they were every night.
Rhea glanced at the tables and chairs still scattered along the street and approached the kitchen counter. In Dutanese, she said to the busy café owner and waiter, Bunia, who had his head lowered, "A glass of Cosa and a beef burrito."
Bunia paused in the midst of washing cups and looked up.
His naturally curly black hair gave him a mixed-blood appearance. He looked at Rhea and revealed an obvious, strange smile that made Rhea inexplicably uneasy.
Rhea knew Bunia well and was aware that he was a shy, kind, and adult man who wasn't particularly adept at communicating with women. He had never smiled like this before.
Bunia fixed his gaze on Rhea and chuckled in a deep voice.
"You've got big boobs."

Chapter 671: Beginning

Upon hearing Bunia's words, Rhea was so surprised that she forgot her anger.

It wasn't the first time she had encountered such a situation. She was shocked that a man who had left a good impression on her would show such an expression and say such words.

And this was when they weren't even friends!

At that moment, Rhea wondered if she was still half-asleep. She also questioned whether Bunia had suffered a mental illness or succumbed to hysteria as the Dream Festival drew near.

Amidst Rhea's bewilderment, Bunia's smile intensified.

He extended his hands across the kitchen counter and attempted to grab Rhea's chest.

Instinctively, Rhea leaned back, attempting to dodge.

After failing to touch her, Bunia retracted his hands, propped himself up on the kitchen counter, and leaped up. Amidst the clinking of coffee cups and glass jars, he lunged at Rhea, who was leaning back.

This reaction, this choice, and this display of power caught Rhea off guard. She didn't have time to remove the bow and arrow from her back. Her waist bent backward, and her right foot kicked up like the other end of a seesaw, sending the transformed Bunia café owner flying.

Simultaneously, a thought flashed through Rhea's mind.

Has he truly lost his mind?

Crash. Bunia crashed to the side of the kitchen counter.

Rhea exerted strength in her back and stood up straight again. Then, she took off her hunting bow, nocked an arrow, and aimed at Bunia, who had just stood up.

A look of fear crossed Bunia's face. He froze for a moment before pleading, "Don't—don't kill me!

"I suddenly lost control just now!"

Looking at Bunia's pleading and fearful face, Rhea found him both familiar and unfamiliar. The arrow on the bowstring was drawn back, but she didn't release it.

...

Entering the streets of Tizamo Town from the primitive forest, Lumian observed the illuminated houses on both sides and scoffed.

"Is this supposed to be terrifying and bizarre?"

This wasn't the first time he had encountered such a scene. In Fourth Epoch Trier, he had witnessed a similar occurrence. Not only had the dark town regained its lights, but the entire Fourth

Epoch Trier had transitioned from silence to noisiness, returning to life.
Faced with this abnormality, Lumian was undoubtedly surprised and highly vigilant. However, he wasn't overwhelmed by intense emotions. On the surface, he observed his surroundings leisurely.
He realized that Reaza and Maslow had vanished. The two patrol team members who should have been following him were gone.
Since it can silently make two Beyonders disappear right under my nose, it can definitely make me vanish just like that... In other words, I must have been affected. There's a high chance that the trance was an external manifestation...
From a mysticism perspective, the town, which had already fallen into a deep slumber, relighting without any significant turn of events, signifies that I'm in another scene, one that is originally related but different...
Could it be that I've been forced into a dream?
Has the Dream Festival officially begun?
I didn't sleep in Hisoka's house. *Why am I still awake?*
Combined with the ongoing investigation, Lumian quickly deduced the current situation.
At that moment, he spotted a figure emerging from a glass window diagonally ahead, surrounded by wooden planks and weeds.
It was a local man in his early forties, with dark brown skin, brown eyes, black hair, and thick lips.
Lumian had seen him before. He was a hunting guide, responsible for leading gentlemen and ladies from Port Pylos and other places into the forest for hunting.
Lumian's impression of him was that he always wore a fawning smile. No matter what others said, he would respond with a string of affirmatives. He never showed anger, even when punished by the gentlemen and ladies he guided.
Upon seeing Lumian, the hunting guide's lips curled into a cruel smile.
He pushed open the window and raised his other hand, revealing a double-barreled shotgun.
"Die, you Northern Continent dog!"
As the hunting guide cursed, he aimed his double-barreled shotgun at Lumian and pulled the trigger without hesitation.
Bang!
A massive amount of lead spread out in a cone, enveloping the corresponding area.
As the hunting guide took aim, Lumian sidestepped and rolled to the other side of the street.

What greeted his eyes were the previously quiet cows, sheep, and horses.
At that moment, the eyes of these animals seemed to turn bloodshot.
Supporting himself with one hand, Lumian leaped up. Amidst the high-pitched mooing and the hunting guide's aim, he leaped to the middle of the stairs leading to the second floor.
"Ah!" A scream suddenly pierced the air, then stopped abruptly.
The door on the second floor swung open, and Lumian was confronted by a young man drenched in bright red blood. He held a massive axe dripping with the crimson liquid, and behind him lay the mangled corpse of an old man in his fifties, the wound carved deep into his chest.
Lumian, who had been wandering Tizamo Town for days, was no stranger to these two individuals.
Lying on the ground, his eyes wide open, was the leathersmith of Tizamo Town. He would purchase the hides of wild beasts brought back by gentlemen, ladies, and town hunters who didn't want to handle them themselves, processing them and selling the finished products.
The axe-wielding figure was his eldest son, who had studied nitrification, tanning, and other leather production techniques from him. He was known as an obedient young man, and his father wasn't an old-fashioned leathersmith who resorted to physical or verbal violence.
This was a characteristic of the people of Tizamo. They were docile, calm, and devoid of intense emotions.
And now, it appeared that the leathersmith's eldest son had just cleaved his father to death.
Upon seeing Lumian, the lad's eyes overflowed with a bloodthirsty smile.
With a shout, he swung his axe at Lumian. On the other side, the hunting guide began reloading his double-barreled shotgun with new lead rounds.
Lumian's body suddenly turned ethereal, merging with his shadow and vanishing into the darkness beside the steps.
Shadow Transformation!
After using this ability to sneak towards the police headquarters for a few seconds, Lumian suddenly heard someone pleading for mercy in fear.
He left the shadows and transformed back into a human. He saw Rhea aiming an arrow at the café owner, Bunia, but she didn't release it.
At that moment, a colossal anaconda, as thick as a barrel, emerged

from the multi-layered hay at the top of the opposite house, hanging upside down.
It widened its cold eyes and foul-smelling mouth, the patterns on its scales seeming to expand and writhe.
This time, Lumian didn't dodge.
Facing the colossal boa attempting to devour him, his eyes darkened as he swung his fist upward.
In an instant, blazing white flames ignited from his fist, enveloping his entire forearm.
Bang!
Lumian's fist smashed into the colossal boa's gaping maw, tearing through the blood-colored flesh and delivering a devastating uppercut to its upper jaw.
Before it could devour its human prey, the colossal boa's cold eyes lost their luster. Its massive body plummeted due to inertia, but Lumian easily sidestepped the falling serpent and retracted his fist.
Clang!
The colossal boa crashed to the ground, its slippery scaled body engulfed in blazing white flames.
Weakness Investigation!
Lumian approached Rhea, noticing that the patrol team member was also regarding him with a vigilant and puzzled expression. He didn't attack immediately.
She... Lumian's heart stirred as a smile played across his lips.
"Looks like you're still lucid."
Wary of Bunia, Rhea observed Louis Berry for a moment, hesitating before speaking.
"Lucid, you say?"
"Yes." Lumian pointed at Bunia, who was glaring at him with undisguised hatred. "Did he attempt to attack you or even rape you?"
"Yes." Rhea didn't ask how he knew. Instead, she inquired, "What's going on?"
Lumian chuckled in response, stating, "Perhaps we've entered the dream once more, but this time, we're not alone."
He made a preliminary judgment based on Rhea's apparent lucidity.
Perhaps the reason for maintaining his own clarity of mind was falling asleep in Hisoka's house and entering the special dream recently!
He needed to find Camus for further confirmation.
Upon hearing Louis Berry's response, a term suddenly flashed through Rhea's mind.

Before she could voice her thoughts, the sound of three chimes suddenly rang out.
The bell's resonant tones reverberated through the streets of Tizamo, as if summoning the town's inhabitants.
Rhea listened intently, her expression shifting slightly.
"It's the cathedral's bell!"
Cathedral, the Saint-Sien Cathedral? Lumian's thoughts immediately turned to the unsettling Padre Cali. He glanced at Rhea.
"Let's go and investigate."
"Alright," Rhea replied without hesitation.
She lowered her bow, no longer aiming the arrow at the café owner, Bunia, and followed Lumian towards the Saint-Sien Cathedral, which was separated from their current location only by the police headquarters.
Bunia's expression fluctuated between longing and hatred, but he didn't dare to pursue them, held back by fear.
Lumian and Rhea sprinted at a breakneck pace. In mere seconds, they traversed the distance past the police headquarters and arrived at the small square in front of the cathedral.
Padre Cali was already standing at the cathedral's entrance.
However, he was no longer clad in the Eternal Blazing Sun Church clergyman's robe with its white and golden threads. Instead, he had donned a dark and intricately designed robe.
The padre, with his dark-brown skin, sunken eyes, and stiff facial features, gazed out at the empty square before his eyes settled on the newly arrived Lumian and Rhea. He held the Bible aloft and shouted with a frenzied expression, "I hereby declare the official commencement of the Dream Festival!
"During the Dream Festival, there are no taboos or restrictions. You are free to do as you wish, including harming and killing.
"Revel in it and unleash all your emotions and desires, everyone!"

Chapter 672: Greater Trouble

Upon hearing Padre Cali's shout, Rhea raised her hunting bow and aimed an arrow wrapped in silver lightning at the clergyman in the complicated black robe. Unlike when she had faced the café owner, Bunia, the anger in her eyes was even more pronounced now, and there was no hesitation. The padre was blaspheming and apostatizing!

At that moment, a slender and powerful palm appeared in front of Rhea's hunting bow, blocking the arrow.

"You..." Rhea turned to Louis Berry, puzzled as to why he had stopped her.

Lumian replied calmly, "Let's wait and see."

As the two of them conversed, Padre Cali revealed a wanton and flamboyant smile. He turned around and walked back to the cathedral with the Bible in his arms.

The golden dome at the cathedral's top and the statues and decorations on the outer walls dimmed under the crimson moonlight.

After Padre Cali's figure disappeared through the cathedral's open door, Rhea looked at Lumian with a dark expression.

"Why?"

Lumian chuckled in response.

"After realizing that this place is suspected to be a dream, I've been pondering a question."

As he spoke, screams and piercing cries reverberated through Tizamo and the surrounding plantations, echoing through the dark night sky.

"What question?" Rhea pressed.

Without giving a direct response, Lumian said, "It's almost certain that we're participating in the Dream Festival.

"Under such circumstances, if you succeed in attacking Padre Cali, what will happen when the Dream Festival concludes and everyone wakes up?"

Without waiting for Rhea's response, Lumian smiled again.

"If you shoot him in the arm, he'll wake up feeling phantom pain in the corresponding location, as if he's suffering from arthritis and his muscles are tearing.

"If you strike his head with a hammer and knock him out, there's a high chance that he'll have a headache, dizziness, and nervous twitches when he returns to reality.

"If you rape and impregnate him, he'll likely feel nauseous, reflux, and bloated, feeling like he might have a fetus in his stomach when he wakes up.

"If you tie him up, continuously electrocute him, and incinerate him with fire, will he feel those sensations in the real world, as if possessed by wraiths or shadows. He may always feel restrained, paralyzed, or in pain."
Rhea listened calmly, not bothering to question why Padre Cali could get pregnant. The more she listened, the more alarmed she became.
This was because Louis Berry's description matched the various manifestations of mass hysteria in Tizamo that the patrol team had gathered.
Lumian turned to Rhea and asked with a smile, "If you had killed Padre Cali with an arrow, what would happen when the dream recedes?"
"He'll die immediately? No..." Rhea denied it.
Tizamo had no incidents of multiple people suddenly dying in their dreams after a night.
Rhea immediately thought of an abnormality.
Between mid-December and mid-March, 80% of the annual deaths in Tizamo occurred, significantly surpassing those in Port Pylos and the surrounding towns.
She changed her words.
"They will gradually die in an irreversible manner within the next three months?"
With a nod, Lumian replied, "I even suspect that the primitive tribe in the forest launched several attacks in those three months mainly to eliminate those who had died in their dreams, allowing them to die reasonably in reality without revealing anything abnormal.
"From December of last year to this year, they only completed one attack. The reason should be that the attack was very successful. Those who should die are dead, and some who don't deserve to die are also dead. There's no need for them to take the risk and they also lost the motivation to come to Tizamo again."
Rhea listened attentively and pondered for a few seconds.
"The Dream Festival originates from that tribe?"
"It's possible. It's more likely that they guard or worship the source and act according to its revelations," Lumian replied simply.
Rhea nodded slightly.
"No wonder you stopped me from shooting Padre Cali. Everyone in Tizamo is likely a victim."
That's why I didn't counterattack the two assailants and only killed the colossal boa with a single punch, Lumian thought. When awoken from the dream, will the colossal boa crawl in front of me and die? If that's the case, I can add more food to Ludwig's plate...

Lumian surveyed the empty square slumbering in the night.
"Let's find Camus now and see if he's still lucid."
...
In Tizamo, on the third floor of the police headquarters, five rooms and one washroom belonged to the patrol team.
One room was used for day-to-day work, while another was used for storing documents and items. The remaining three apartments belonged to the local patrol team members, one for each person.
With the arrival of Camus and Kolobo, Maslow had temporarily moved to Loban's to vacate a room for his colleagues from Port Pylos.
Clang! Clang! Clang!
Amidst the reverberations of the bell, Camus jolted awake.
He glanced out the window into the deep night, illuminated by a faint crimson moonlight. Momentarily disoriented, he wondered about the hour.
Just as Camus reached for his pocket watch, intending to check the time, he noticed Kolobo's absence from the makeshift bed.
A sense of unease washed over him, urging him into action. With silent determination, he rose from his bed under the eerie crimson moonlight, securing his pocket watch and weapon.
Stepping cautiously into the corridor, Camus found it unusually still, cloaked in shadowy silence. Beyond the confines of the police headquarters, eerie cries and distant wails pierced the night, emanating from various corners of Tizamo and its surrounding plantations.
Drawing on his keen awareness honed through experience as a Public Security Officer, Camus sensed a disturbance in his Jurisdiction.
Suddenly, he instinctively dropped to the ground and rolled forward.
A deafening crack echoed through the corridor as a wooden door, which Camus would have passed by, splintered and burst outward.
In the blink of an eye, a broadsword slashed through the air, propelled by a savage force, slicing through the empty corridor.
As Camus swiftly evaded the attack, he turned to face his assailant.
It was Loban, the towering patrol member standing at over 1.9 meters, with short light-gold hair and piercing light-blue eyes.
A cruel smirk adorned the Feysacian's face, his eyes glinting with unmistakable greed.
In the dim moonlight, his features were obscured by shadows, emanating an eerie malevolence.
Upon spotting Loban, Camus's eyes sparked with determination.

Psychic Piercing!
Loban recoiled with a pained cry, instinctively shielding his head with his hands, relinquishing his grip on the broadsword.
Seizing the opportunity, Camus swiftly drew his revolver, taking aim at his teammate.
In a moment of hesitation, Camus faltered, then lowered his weapon.
Bang!
The bullet found its mark, striking Loban's knee with brutal force, tearing through flesh and shattering bone.
A Doctor from the Church of Earth Mother could mend such injuries!
Loban crumpled to the ground, writhing in agony, his attempts to curl up thwarted by the searing pain.
Camus lowered his revolver, rose to his feet, and pressed forward towards the end of the corridor.
As he descended the stairs, Camus passed by a cluttered cubicle, its contents scattered haphazardly, and caught faint murmurs from within.
His heart skipped a beat as he whispered, "Kolobo, is that you?"
A moment of tense silence followed before Kolobo's voice, tinged with panic and fear, replied, "Stay back! Don't come any closer! Spare me!"
Camus frowned, sensing that Kolobo's demeanor was far from his usual composed self.
Though prone to bouts of fear and unease, Kolobo typically pushed through his anxieties to fulfill his duties. This level of hysteria was unprecedented.
What's wrong with Kolobo? Camus wondered.
Choosing to stay put rather than risk exacerbating the situation, Camus observed as Kolobo fell into an uneasy silence, as if attempting to fade into obscurity.
After more than ten seconds, Camus contemplated assessing Kolobo's condition. If it proved dire, he resolved to retreat and seek out Louis Berry.
Suddenly, the sound of two sets of rapid footsteps echoed from below.
Camus swiftly pivoted, training his revolver down the stairs. There, he beheld Louis Berry, sporting a golden straw hat, accompanied by Rhea, armed with a hunting bow and arrow.
Gazing at the barrel aimed in their direction, Louis Berry chuckled lightly, his tone calm.
"Welcome to the Dream Festival."
The Dream Festival? It's the Dream Festival? Realization dawned

on Camus. He glanced between the smiling Louis Berry and the serious Rhea, confusion etched on his features.
"Why are we still lucid?"
Observing their composed demeanor, Camus deduced that they hadn't succumbed to the overwhelming emotions and desires that often engulfed dreamers. Yet, he kept his revolver steady, wary of any sudden developments.
"Perhaps our early entry into this peculiar dream, thanks to Twanaku's house, has granted us this lucidity," Lumian proposed, offering his deduction.
Rhea seized the opportunity to suggest that encounters within the dream might hold sway over reality to some extent, sharing the conjecture with Camus.
Initially relieved that he hadn't resorted to lethal force against Loban, Camus's expression turned grave as he addressed his companions.
"The three of us aren't the only Beyonders in Tizamo. If we adhere to the notion that we can't retaliate when attacked, it will severely hamper our ability to defend ourselves."
Lumian smiled. "Who said we can't kill? If someone poses a threat to me, they shall be killed accordingly."
Rhea and Camus fell silent.
After a moment of contemplation, Camus nodded decisively, gesturing towards the sundry compartment nestled in the stairwell.
"Kolobo's extreme reaction stems from fear. He won't pose a threat to us. Let him seek refuge there, undisturbed."
As Rhea concurred, Lumian's expression suddenly shifted.
He asked, "Is Kolobo also in this dream?"
Kolobo, who has been in Tizamo for less than a week like me, has also been forced to participate in the Dream Festival?
"Yes." Camus asked in confusion, "Is there a problem?"
A shadow crossed Lumian's features as he responded gravely.
"This suggests there may be a larger problem at play."
Perhaps one more terrifying than the Dream Festival itself!
Before Camus and Rhea could inquire further, Lumian abruptly interjected.
"Wait here for me."
With that, he vanished from the stairway, utilizing Spirit World Traversal.
Lumian reappeared on the second floor of the Brieu Motel, just outside his suite.
In the next instant, a piercing scream echoed through the air, filled with agony and terror.

It was Lugano.

Chapter 673: "Sealing" Spell II

Confirming his fears, Lumian slipped his key into the lock, easing the door to the suite open without a sound.

Now, he knew without a doubt that Ludwig, the terrifying sealed creature, would unleash his hunger and frenzy at the Dream Festival.

Beneath the crimson moonlight streaming through the window, Lugano thrashed wildly, his face twisted in agony.

Lurking at the end of his flailing arm was Ludwig, dressed in a child's nightcap and sky-blue pajamas dotted with yellow stars. The sickening sounds of bones crunching and flesh tearing filled the air.

Amidst the chaos, droplets of blood splattered onto the floor.

Suddenly, Ludwig lunged forward like a frenzied animal, his jaws closing in on Lugano's arm with a sickening crack.

"Ah!"

Lugano's scream pierced the air once more, threatening to blow the roof.

Instinctively, he tried to wrench his arm free from Ludwig's grasp and shove the creature away with his other hand. Pain seared through him, and he felt himself teetering on the edge of unconsciousness.

Observing Ludwig closely, Lumian darted behind him, his nostrils flaring.

Two beams of white light shot forth from his nose, enveloping Ludwig. Ludwig paused, shutting his eyes.

But before Lumian could react, the boy's mouth resumed its relentless assault on Lugano's arm, pulverizing bone and flesh alike.

His eyes snapped open.

The Spell of Harrumph can only daze Ludwig for a moment, and that's only if he's sealed... Lumian reminded himself, taking a deep breath to steady his nerves.

He glanced at Lugano, who had noticed him but was too consumed by agony to speak. Raising a hand, Lumian motioned for Lugano to remain patient.

Though Lugano's mind raced with curses and frustration, he remained unable to voice them.

As thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian gave an imperceptible nod.

Changing his focus, Lumian bypassed Ludwig, who was engrossed in devouring Lugano, and seized Lugano's shoulder.

In an instant, Lumian retrieved a sharp straight sword he had

acquired from Port Santa, pulling it from his Traveler's Bag.
What is he trying to do? Amidst the throes of pain, Lugano's thoughts scattered.
With a swift motion, Lumian swung the sword, the blade bursting into white flames.
The fiery sword crashed down upon Lugano's arm, where Ludwig had been feasting, striking at the joint.
With a sharp sound, Lugano's forearm tore away from Ludwig's grasp, leaving behind a gory, truncated limb.
Simultaneously, Lumian's form began to fade, and even Lugano, whom he had grasped, vanished from sight.
Teleport!
But Lumian hadn't gone far. Both he and Lugano reappeared at the suite's doorway.
The agony persisted, but Lugano's momentary relief vanished as Ludwig's figure once again came into view. The sight of the boy, his mouth still bloody with Lugano's remaining forearm, sent a shiver down his spine.
The fear momentarily eclipsed the pain, and Lugano's mind raced with frantic questions.
Why not teleport away from Tizamo?
Why not teleport to Port Pylos?
Why are we still lingering in front of Ludwig?
Meanwhile, Ludwig had turned his attention to the doorway, his blond hair matted with blood, his brown eyes glinting with ravenous hunger.
With the speed of a child his age, he advanced toward Lumian and Lugano,
all the while chewing and swallowing what remained of Lugano's arm.
Unperturbed, Lumian calmly returned the straight sword to his Traveler's Bag.
Under Lugano's horrified gaze, Lumian conjured an entire almond pistachio cream thousand-layer cake and hurled it onto the floor beside Ludwig.
Ludwig's sprint slowed as he seemed to ponder which delicacy to indulge in first.
Ultimately, he turned his attention back to Lugano.
The sight of blood, flesh, and marrow infused with spiritual essence seemed to intoxicate him even further.
Capitalizing on Ludwig's momentary indecision, Lumian delved into his Traveler's Bag once more, extracting a fragment of Hisoka's corpse and tossing it aside.
Ludwig's gaze followed the offering, his lips instinctively

moistening, yet he made no move to change course.
It seemed he found the offering beneath his tastes, too dirty to be his top choice.
Lumian systematically tossed out ingredients brimming with spiritual energy, one after the other, creating a barrier of tempting treats around Ludwig. Cream pancakes, fruit tarts, sandwiches oozing with cream, bouchée à la reine, chocolates infused with liquor, cookies, candied plums, éclairs, Charlotte desserts, and a myriad of other delicacies
formed a tempting ring around Ludwig, impeding his advance toward Lugano.
Turning to Lugano with a stern expression, Lumian's voice took on a commanding tone. "What are you waiting for? Stem the bleeding first!"
Startled, Lugano obeyed, his left palm emitting a faint glow as he applied pressure to the stump of his injured arm.
As Ludwig indulged in the feast laid out before him, his urgency waned. Though still concerned for Lugano, he no longer rushed forward.
In the final stages, Lumian threw out boxes of biscuits, sweets, beef jerky, and assorted provisions, encircling Ludwig with a haphazard yet effective "wall" of food.
Nearly all of Lumian's seven days' worth of rations for Ludwig had been deployed from his Traveler's Bag.
"What... what's the meaning of this?" Lugano, having successfully treated his wound and eased his pain, watched Lumian's actions with bewilderment. He couldn't fathom why his employer was so fixated on feeding Ludwig in the midst of their predicament.
"Sealing that fellow," Lumian replied calmly, his hands never ceasing their task.
"Sealing?" Lugano nearly doubted his hearing.
Isn't this too absurd?
Using food to seal a monster?
He couldn't recall ever encountering such a concept, not even in the most far-fetched novels on the market. No author would dream up such a peculiar method!
Wouldn't a conventional seal involve the use of spiritually potent materials to inscribe mystical symbols and patterns, followed by ritualistic magic or the employment of a mystical artifact?
What possible purpose could hurling food at the monster serve?
Lumian smiled and sighed.
"Once he's satiated, he won't have any appetite left for you or anyone else here.
"And there's enough food to keep him occupied until dawn, and

possibly even beyond."
Lumian had devised this plan upon realizing that Ludwig's sole desire was to eat. Coupled with his behavior during the Dream Festival, Lumian was confident that Ludwig was now driven purely by his insatiable hunger—a unique trait exclusive to him in Tizamo.
In this scenario, as long as Ludwig's appetite was sated, he could remain confined within the suite, feasting without posing a threat to others.
What was the distinction between this and traditional sealing methods?
Of course, the success of this makeshift seal depended on the Dream Festival concluding before Ludwig depleted the seven days' worth of food.
Otherwise, Lumian's ability to hunt in the forest might not keep pace with Ludwig's voracious appetite.
Lugano's understanding dawned upon hearing Lumian's explanation.
Indeed, this method offered a practical means of temporarily restraining Ludwig.
Who said it couldn't be deemed a seal?
Understanding one's target's preferences and weaknesses allowed for the implementation of a seal without resorting to mysticism!
Observing Ludwig still attempting to approach the door amidst his feast, Lumian realized the creature's reluctance to part with Lugano. With a swift movement, he grasped Lugano's shoulder and teleported them both to a corner of the second-floor stairwell in the police headquarters.
Ludwig briefly glanced at the vacant doorway before refocusing on his culinary conquest within the suite.
...
"Are you certain everything's under control?" Lugano inquired anxiously, the moment he exited the spirit world.
Lumian chuckled in response.
"As long as no Beyonder happens to stroll by the door, he won't abandon his feast."
Relieved, Lugano exhaled deeply, casting a rueful glance at his remaining arm. Thoughts swirled in his mind as he contemplated his future.
At least I'm still alive. As long as I'm alive...
In the future, I'll see if I can save up enough money to afford a mechanical arm from the Church of Steam. That might bolster my combat strength.
The Doctor's expertise could only do so much, as transplanting

another's limb was beyond the realm of possibility.
Camus and Rhea, observing Lugano's bloody limb, furrowed their brows, recalling Louis Berry's ominous warning of a greater issue.
"What happened?" Camus inquired.
Lumian smiled.
"It's a complication caused by that big problem, but I've managed to seal it temporarily. Just remember, stay away from the Brieu Motel, especially the door on the second-floor suite."
Relieved to hear that Louis Berry had intervened, Camus assured Lugano,
"Thankfully, it's all just a dream. You'll be fine once you wake up."
"A dream?" Lugano was perplexed.
Lumian offered no further explanation, simply remarking, "Indeed, it's a dream. But remember, if you perish in the dream, you perish in reality too."
Amid Lugano's bafflement, Lumian redirected said to Camus and Rhea, "Let's make our way to Twanaku's house now."
His primary objective in investigating the Dream Festival was to locate Hisoka's gold and the item acquired from the Nois family's Demon. He intended to assess any changes in their respective locations following the festival's commencement.
If nothing surfaced, Lumian planned to seek out Padre Cali at the Saint-Sien Cathedral.
The peculiar condition of "weakness in the depths of the Spirit Body" possessed by Padre Cali in reality set him apart from everyone else in Tizamo. This hinted at something distinctly special about the padre. Additionally, it was Padre Cali who had officially inaugurated the Dream Festival.
Camus hesitated, his silence suggesting he might have pressing matters to attend to.
In that moment, Rhea regarded Lumian with confusion, gesturing towards Lugano.
"Why is he still lucid?"

Chapter 674: Manor

Upon hearing Rhea's question, Lumian snapped to his senses and turned to Lugano.

In his haste to save and "seal" Lugano, he had overlooked Lugano's condition!

Ever since this Doctor had gotten his injuries under control, he had been responding to Lumian's questions. He was lucid and rational, a stark contrast to the other participants in the Dream Festival.

It had to be known that even Ludwig, the monster himself, couldn't effectively control his appetite and had resorted to devouring humans!

Moreover, Lugano had never slept in Hisoka's house, nor had he entered this peculiar dream realm before!

Seeing Rhea, Camus, and his employer staring at him intently, Lugano, still grappling with the lingering pain, was utterly perplexed.

"Why wouldn't I be lucid?

"Aren't you all still in your right minds?"

Everyone seems to be in the same state. *Why should I be the only one with an issue?*

Lumian carefully observed Lugano's emotions and asked in a calm tone, "Have you ventured outside the motel recently?"

"I did. I assisted Ludwig in purchasing roasted meat and pastries made from palm tree cores," Lugano recalled.

Lumian smiled.

"Did you sleep anywhere other than the motel?"

"No, I wouldn't dare to engage with the women here." Lugano shook his head without hesitation.

He was evidently a little regretful about this, as there were numerous mixed-blood girls in Tizamo who possessed a different allure compared to those in the Northern Continent.

As the two men conversed, Camus and Rhea meticulously searched for any abnormalities in Lugano's body. However, apart from being sufficiently lucid and lacking excessive emotions and desires, Lugano appeared to be unaffected by the strange phenomenon.

Lumian looked at Lugano with a thoughtful smile and said, "We're being forced to participate in an event called the Dream Festival. Simply put, we're dreaming. We can do anything in this dream, but if we die here, we'll die in reality too.

"Aside from us, everyone in Tizamo is under the influence of intense emotions and desires, just like Ludwig.

"They're conscious—strictly speaking—but they've chosen to show their malice and express their long-suppressed desires. If we can

subdue them, we might be able to communicate, but they'll instinctively try to deceive us."
Remembering how the café owner, Bunia, had immediately changed his attitude after being targeted by her arrow and begged for mercy, Rhea agreed with Louis Berry's judgment.
The Dream Festival participants weren't stupid or crazy. Their excessive desires and emotions were the main cause of their uncontrollable evil!
"I see..." Lugano finally understood.
Realizing what Rhea's question meant, he blurted out, "Why are we lucid and rational?"
After a pause, Lugano's voice lowered as he added, "W-why can I stay lucid and rational?"
Lumian smiled.
"We can stay lucid and rational because we entered this special dream before. We left marks and auras in certain places.
"As for you, I'm not sure why."
As he spoke, he watched Lugano's face closely, observing the change in his servant's expression.
Lugano said in a daze, his voice tinged with fear, "I don't know why this is happening either..."
Noticing that Lugano remained calm even after his issue was brought to light, Lumian seized the chance to glimpse into his servant's luck.
Currently amidst a bloody calamity, Lugano might fall victim to an ailment in the coming days... The first part makes sense, considering Ludwig has just eaten half his arm. But what does the second half imply? *Could the Dream Festival span several days?* Impossible. If it truly lasted that long, Tizamo's predicament would have been discovered much earlier... Does this suggest that Lugano would succumb to an illness during the Dream Festival itself? An illness similar to death in the waking world, one that wouldn't be instantly cured even if he awakens and receives the Mass's blessing? Lumian quietly pondered the meaning behind Lugano's revealed fate.
Shifting his gaze to Camus and Rhea, he realized that they, too, would soon face a grim and bloody ordeal. If they failed to navigate it properly, they risked slipping further into peril.
As these thoughts swirled in Lumian's mind, he turned to Camus and Rhea and declared, "I'm taking my servant with us."
It wasn't an act of kindness or generosity. Rather, Lumian feared that leaving Lugano to his own devices, given his inexplicable lucidity and rationality, might trigger the abnormality within him and alter the course of the Dream Festival in unpredictable ways.

Better to keep him close at hand, where he could be monitored and any potential accidents prevented. If Lugano truly unleashed a dire problem, Lumian could always end his life first, eliminating any future complications.
Camus and Rhea exchanged disgruntled glances before conceding, "It's your call to make."
"We must hurry to Twanaku's house," Lumian reiterated his earlier proposal.
Camus's gaze drifted toward the cubicle where Kolobo lay hidden, a hint of hesitation in his voice as he asked, "Any idea where Captain Reaza and the others might be?"
"They were supposed to appear beside me when the Dream Festival began, but they were nowhere to be seen," Lumian admitted, recounting the situation honestly.
Perhaps the dream's correspondence to reality was imperfect. The location where each person entered this peculiar dreamscape might be influenced by factors like their understanding, the dream's state, where they had slept, and myriad other variables.
Lumian mused that if he hadn't maintained his lucidity and rationality, he might have awoken in the master bedroom of the Brieu Motel's suite.
"Should we try to locate them first?" Camus proposed, a note of uncertainty in his tone.
Lumian let out a wry chuckle.
"Why? To engage them in combat?"
Neither Reaza nor Maslow had ever slept in Hisoka's house before. The likelihood of them lacking self-control and succumbing to malice and base desires was high.
When the time came, Lumian might not possess the strength to control the pace and intensity of the battle against such formidable Beyonders as he did with ordinary folk, not without the risk of causing deaths.
Camus and Rhea lapsed into a simultaneous silence, neither keen on the prospect of a life-and-death struggle with their own teammates.
Just as Lumian was about to signal the two patrol team members to approach, Camus gritted his teeth as he declared, "There's somewhere I need to go before I head to Twanaku's house."
"And where might that be?" Lumian inquired, raising an eyebrow.
Camus replied in a deep voice, "Palm Manor."
Lumian chuckled.
"You wish to rescue Miss Amandina?"
Camus nodded firmly, a hint of embarrassment tinging his features.

"Yes, that's right."
"You needn't worry. This is merely a dream. If one is violated within the dream, they'll only experience a touch of hysteria upon waking. No substantial harm will befall them," Lumian stated matter-of-factly, his intention not to provoke Camus.
Camus's expression remained unwavering.
"I'm aware. But I fear she may not be able to cope with it in her dream state and might resort to drastic measures. It could lead to her demise."
Without waiting for Lumian's response, Camus spoke gravely, "You can proceed to Twanaku's house first. I'll make my way to Palm Manor and rendezvous with you later."
"By the time you're done, we might not be at Twanaku's house anymore," Rhea cautioned him.
Camus nodded gently.
"I've made this decision of my own accord. I'm prepared to bear any consequences that may follow."
Lumian locked eyes with Camus, remaining silent for a stretch.
Camus felt an indescribable pressure weighing upon him, his mind conjuring the tragic outcomes he might face, but he pursed his lips and refused to retract his suggestion.
After more than ten seconds of silence, his expression unchanged, Lumian finally spoke.
"Let us head to Palm Manor now."
Huh? Before Camus could react, Lumian's hand firmly grasped his shoulder.
Simultaneously, Lumian's other hand darted out, reaching for Rhea's arm.
Rhea's instinctive reaction was to dodge, but the memory of how Lugano had been transported flashed through her mind.
Her tense shoulders relaxed a fraction.
With Camus and Rhea securely in his grasp, Lumian shot Lugano a meaningful look.
Lugano, displaying a practiced ease, approached and latched onto a corner of Lumian's vest.
In the next second, Lumian's figure blurred, the haziness rapidly spreading to engulf Camus, Rhea, and Lugano.
As Rhea and Camus found themselves surrounded by layers of indescribable colors and formless objects, intense emotions surged within their hearts.
Could this be the spirit world?
Is this what teleportation feels like?
Was this how the great adventurer, Gehrman Sparrow, managed to appear before any pirate at a moment's notice?

Having witnessed Louis Berry's abrupt disappearance and subsequent return with his servant in tow, Camus and Rhea had speculated that this might be the famed teleportation ability that had become the stuff of legend across the Five Seas, thanks to Gehrman Sparrow's extraordinary exploits.
It seemed their suspicions had been right on the mark!
Matani's patrol team boasted numerous adventurers among its ranks, and Camus and Rhea were well-versed in the myriad rumors that circulated the Five Seas.
The instant they experienced teleportation firsthand, their bodies departed the dream's spirit world, rematerializing before a four-story beige edifice.
This was none other than the main building of Palm Manor.
In the blink of an eye, Lumian, Camus, Rhea, and Lugano had reached their destination.
The manor was awash with cries, screams, sinister laughter, and high-pitched singing.
Just over ten meters from the main building, near a garden shrubbery, a mixed-blood lady's maid lay pinned to the ground by a group of slaves, her clothes half-stripped as she cried out in desperation.
She struggled with all her might, but how could she hope to resist the adult men? She was utterly helpless, pinned down and at their mercy.
Witnessing this scene, the former Public Security Officer, Camus, instinctively yearned to intervene, but he quickly reminded himself that this was a dream. Such events wouldn't truly impact reality. At most, they would result in a certain degree of curable hysteria.
It would be a waste of time to stop it, and it would only serve to delay my search for Amandina. Moreover, it would be pointless... Camus warned himself, forcibly averting his gaze as he ascended the steps into the main building.
At that moment, Rhea, who had been silent for a couple of seconds, turned from facing the manor's main building.
"You guys head in first."
With her back to Lumian, Camus, and Lugano, she spoke in a nonchalant tone. Leaning forward slightly, she strode purposefully towards the bushes at the garden's edge, making her way to the mixed-blood lady's maid who was being violated by the slaves.

Chapter 675: Evil

In a few swift strides, Rhea positioned herself behind the slaves, raised her right foot, and delivered a powerful kick.

With a resounding bang, the slave pressing down on the mixed-blood lady's maid was sent flying, landing unceremoniously in the bushes at the garden's edge.

The other three abruptly turned to face Rhea.

Before they could get a clear look at their assailant, Rhea followed up with a fluid roundhouse kick, knocking another one to the ground.

The remaining two, torn between greed, desire, and fear, took one look at Rhea and turned tail, fleeing to another part of the manor.

Rhea retracted her left foot and fixed a cold stare upon the two servants struggling to their feet. She raised her hunting bow, nocking an arrow with a smooth, practiced motion.

The two servants licked their lips in unison. Unwilling but fearful, they swiftly clambered over the bushes and vanished into the garden.

Only then did Rhea lower her gaze to the mixed-blood lady's maid, whose face was still streaked with tears and confusion.

"Are you all right?"

The mixed-blood lady's maid shook her head repeatedly. With trembling hands, she hastily tidied her half-torn dress and retrieved a dagger that had fallen beside her.

Seeing this, Rhea wasted no time.

"Find a secluded corner and hide until dawn."

With that, Rhea pivoted on her heel and prepared to dash back to where Louis Berry, Camus, and the others stood waiting at the door of the manor's main building.

As the mixed-blood lady's maid stood up, her expression darkened, and she raised the dagger clutched in her hand, plunging it towards Rhea's back.

Catching sight of the impending danger, Camus shouted, "Watch out!"

Though Rhea hadn't sensed the approaching threat, she instinctively heeded Camus's warning and reacted.

Surrendering to inertia, she fell forward and rolled to the side, narrowly evading the dagger's deadly path.

As she rolled, Rhea pivoted to face her attacker, eyes narrowing as she instinctively raised her bow, aiming at the mixed-blood lady's maid.

The mixed-blood lady's maid brandished her dagger, shouting in Intisian, her words laced with hatred, "Why can you join the patrol

team, while I'm stuck as a mere lady's maid? Don't we both hail from the Southern Continent?
"Why? I even have Intisian blood coursing through my veins!"
Before she could complete her tirade, a crimson Fire Raven, its hue bordering on white, swooped in from nowhere, colliding with the steel dagger.
With a resounding clang, the dagger heated up, an explosive force wrenching it from the mixed-blood lady's maid's grasp, sending it flying several meters before clattering to the ground.
The mixed-blood lady's maid faltered, fear supplanting the hatred in her eyes.
Lumian, his black hair and green eyes striking, stood on the steps of the manor's main house, one hand casually tucked in his pocket. He called out, his voice carrying, "Where is Miss Amandina?"
Uh... A pang of embarrassment struck Camus.
In his haste to rescue Miss Amandina, he had acted with a distinct lack of professionalism!
He had been a guest at Palm Manor, but he had never been invited to visit Amandina's room upstairs. Consequently, he found himself unsure of which floor and room to search for her later.
If he were to search floor by floor, he would undoubtedly encounter countless obstacles amidst the current chaos.
The mixed-blood lady's maid's expression shifted, revealing a blatant desire and anticipation.
"She's sleeping in her room. Third floor, second room facing the rubber forest.
"Make haste. She's a vision of beauty, fragrant and pristine. Her figure is exquisite, her skin smooth as silk. She's a cut above the rest of us. Many a gentleman considers her their dream lover. Go, quickly!"
As she neared the end of her speech, the mixed-blood lady's maid gritted her teeth, her eyes alight with an illusory desire to witness something transpire.
Lugano's hair stood on end, a chill running down his spine as he confronted the stark malevolence of human nature.
Clap! Clap! Clap! Lumian shook his head, a smile playing on his lips as he applauded.
Rhea fell silent for a couple of seconds before rising to her feet and departing the area.
After a few steps, she paused, turning to regard the mixed-blood lady's maid. In a deep, solemn voice, she reiterated, "Find a secluded spot and hide until dawn."
With those parting words, Rhea turned away from the mixed-

blood lady's maid and sprinted back to the steps at the main house's entrance.
Lumian averted his gaze and led the way through the open brown door.
As he, Camus, and the others entered, they were greeted by a startling sight in the living room. A middle-aged woman in a disheveled nightgown, her half-exposed body glistening with sweat and her black hair in disarray, sat astride a sturdy native slave. Her movements were intense, and she appeared utterly immersed, alternating between shouting and cursing. The native slave, clearly enjoying the experience, eagerly cooperated.
Near the staircase, a group of five or six servants and slaves, armed with an assortment of shotguns, rifles, and other weapons, intermittently fired bullets up the stairs. Occasional counterattacks emanated from the area leading to the second floor.
Camus stood frozen, his gaze fixed on the middle-aged woman's flushed face.
"You know her?" Lumian asked, a smile playing on his lips.
It was Rhea who replied, "She's Sir Petit's wife, Miss Amandina's mother, Madam Simona."
"I never imagined she would be like this..." Camus said, his voice low and somber.
Lumian smiled and applauded once more.
"Can't she indulge in her dreams?
"For the Dream Festival, this is something we should encourage. No one is being forced. How delightfully harmless."
Camus found himself momentarily at a loss for words.
Lumian then said to Rhea, "During the Dream Festival, there's a high likelihood that the person you save will also be a bad person and may even attack you."
Rhea fell silent for a few seconds before responding in a low voice, "Even if something like that happens again, I'll still save her."
Lumian dropped the subject and shifted his attention to Camus.
"Are you prepared to see the other side of Miss Amandina? Perhaps she will..."
Lumian left the sentence unfinished, instead casting a meaningful glance at Madam Simona, who was in the throes of fierce, foul-mouthed ecstasy.
Camus exhaled slowly, his voice resolute.
"I'm here to save her. It doesn't matter if she's good or bad, kind, malicious, chaste, or indulgent.
"After helping her find a safe hiding place and making sure she waits until dawn, we'll head to Twanaku's house."

I'm here to save her. It doesn't matter if she's good or bad, kind, malicious... Lumian quietly repeated the first half of the sentence, a smile playing on his lips as he regarded the servants and slaves attempting to occupy the staircase. He raised his voice, asking, "Has anyone seen Miss Amandina? Has she come downstairs?"
The servants and slaves turned their attention to Lumian and his companions, swiftly redirecting their firearms.
Lumian calmly extended his right hand, making a grabbing motion.
With this gesture, crimson flames, their hue bordering on white, ignited in the air, forming a curtain that Lumian seemed to snatch from the void.
With a deft grab and push, the fiery curtain abruptly split, transforming into Fire Birds that hurtled towards the shotguns, rifles, and revolvers before they could be properly aimed.
Amidst a series of muffled explosions, the guns dropped from the servants' and slaves' hands, clattering to the ground, damaged beyond use.
The servants and slaves themselves suffered only minor burns, their grip on their weapons faltering.
Since advancing to Reaper, Lumian's mastery over flames had grown. Even without the Lie earring, he could achieve this level of control.
Moreover, he hadn't unleashed his full power. He hadn't even summoned the blazing white flames in order to minimize the damage.
"Now, can we have a civilized conversation?" Lumian smiled at the servants and slaves.
Behind him, crimson Fire Ravens, their color nearly white, materialized, poised to strike at a moment's notice.
An Intisian valet, who seemed to hold some influence among the group, couldn't conceal his fear as he replied, "Amandina hasn't come down. Otherwise..."
He couldn't help but lick his lips.
"And who were you shooting at?" Lumian inquired.
"It's Petit, that bastard who deserves to rot in hell, and his butler, the one who's always wielding that damn whip!" A dark-skinned slave picked up the fallen firearm, only to discover that it was broken, just like everyone else's.
They had planned to retrieve more guns from another room on the first floor, but for now, they didn't dare make a move.
"Is that so?" Lumian nodded, a look of enlightenment crossing his features. "Carry on, then."
He turned around, leading the ten to twenty Fire Ravens that had

gradually dispersed, and said to Camus and the others,
"Let's scale the side of the building to reach the third floor."
Teleportation wasn't an optimal option at this distance, not after having used it four times already.
Of course, since advancing to Reaper, Lumian could now perform 11 to 12 Spirit World Traversals without relying on the spirituality accumulated through his Ascetic abilities. It was a marked improvement from his previous limitations.
Camus and the others raised no objections. Lugano, however, trembled as he asked, "H-how am I supposed to climb?"
He swung the stump that was all that remained of his right arm.
Lumian glanced at him and said matter-of-factly, "Camus will assist you."
Me? Camus was momentarily taken aback before assessing his own skills and concluding that it was indeed feasible.
Before long, the four of them had ascended to the third floor, making use of the statues, decorations, metal pipes, and side balcony adorning the outer wall.
As soon as Camus pushed open the door leading to the corridor, he caught sight of a figure.
It was Amandina's personal maid, an Intisian lady's maid clad in a white cloth nightgown.
At that moment, the young lady's maid stood bathed in the dim moonlight, a bloody dagger clutched in her hand, her expression inscrutable.
Drip. Drip. The bright red blood from the dagger fell onto the corridor carpet, each drop a vivid splash of color.
Camus's heart clenched.
"What have you done?"
The lady's maid's face broke into a satisfied, carefree smile.
"I killed it. I've been annoyed by it for far too long!"
It? In Intisian, "she" and "it" were two entirely different words.
Amidst his surprise, Camus followed the trail of dripping blood, his gaze falling upon Amandina's beloved pet dog, lying motionless at the door of the adjacent room.
Phew... Camus breathed a sigh of relief before asking in a deep, serious voice, "Where's Miss Amandina?"
The lady's maid's expression turned resentful.
"I'm looking for her too! She left an hour ago!"
An hour ago... Before the Dream Festival began? Camus pressed further, "Where did she go?"
The lady's maid, still holding the blood-stained dagger, replied with a contorted expression, "She went on a date with my Robert!"
Camus fell silent.

Lumian shook his head. Under the watchful eyes of the lady's maid, who yearned to kill but felt outnumbered, he swiftly searched the entire third floor with Rhea and the others, but found no trace of Amandina.

"Let's go." Lumian turned to Camus, his voice firm.

Camus had no choice but to concede defeat.

The four of them immediately teleported outside Hisoka's house.

Just as Lumian was about to proceed, he sensed something and looked up at the third floor.

A face appeared through the glass window of a room on the third floor.

The face was graced with a high nose bridge, piercing blue eyes, and thick black hair tied into a simple knot atop her head. Her brows exuded a youthful, vibrant aura.

Amandina!

It was said that Amandina had gone on a date with her fiancé, Robert!

Chapter 676: You Intisians

Camus was stunned to find Amandina here. His astonishment far outweighed any joy he might have felt.

From the window above, Amandina noticed the four figures below. Her face twisted in alarm, and she disappeared into the house's shadowy interior.

Taken aback, Camus called out, "Don't be scared! We're here to keep you safe!"

While shouting, he raced up the stairs to the second floor of Twanaku's residence.

His visit to Palm Manor had confirmed Louis Berry's theory. The Dream Festival participants had lost control of their actions, driven by hidden malevolence and desires. Yet, their minds remained lucid, allowing for communication.

Camus couldn't be sure if the possessed individuals would misinterpret others' words. Furthermore, this wasn't true clarity of thought. They wouldn't realize they were dreaming, and the experience would fade upon waking.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Camus and Rhea charged into the building, taking the steps two at a time.

Behind the house, out of sight, a glass window set in wooden planks swung open. Amandina, clad in black hunting gear, nimbly climbed out. She used the wall's protrusions and crevices to swiftly descend to the ground.

As her feet touched the earth, she noticed a figure watching her from the side.

It was Lugano, his right arm ending in a bloody stump, his face marred with crimson stains. He looked a frightful mess.

Amandina's heart clenched. She pressed her back against a pillar supporting Twanaku's house, fists tightening as she shut her eyes.

In the same instant, Lugano's eyelids drooped, his mind growing hazy.

He collapsed to the ground, falling into a deep sleep where he lay.

Amandina's eyes snapped open, no longer using her power to force the battle-worn man into slumber.

Doing so would trap her in a profound sleep, able to act only in her Nightmare form, her body immobile. And the man wasn't alone!

Before Lugano could wake naturally, Amandina turned to flee, seeking a safe haven to conceal herself.

At that moment, she heard a smirking voice.

"So you're a Beyonder too."

Amandina instinctively glanced over and saw the adventurer, Louis Berry, standing before another wooden pillar supporting

Twanaku's house, not far from her.
The handsome Louis Berry, with his dark hair and emerald eyes, had one hand in his pocket as he leaned against the pillar. His feet were crossed behind him, and his lips curled into a playful smile as he looked her way.
The dim crimson moonlight of the night lent him an air of enigmatic and sinister allure.
Amandina tightened her fists once more and closed her eyes.
However, her spiritual senses told her that Louis Berry had vanished in an instant.
She couldn't find the target and couldn't use her corresponding abilities.
Moments later, Amandina, with her heightened spiritual perception, cast her gaze towards the shadows on the ground floor of the house.
She sensed something stirring there.
At the same time, Amandina heard an illusory and ethereal voice.
"We mean you no harm.
"We're not affected by the Dream Festival."
Amandina, who was about to use her spiritual perception to lock onto the formless presence in the shadow, was taken aback.
Just then, Camus and Rhea ran to the corresponding window and called out to Amandina,
"We're here to protect you!"
"We have enough self-control."
After assessing the number and strength of the two sides, Amandina asked skeptically, "Why aren't you affected?"
As she spoke, she locked onto the formless entity in the shadow, believing it to be the strongest among the opposing group—the adventurer, Louis Berry. If she discovered anything amiss and something went awry, controlling Louis Berry first would effectively increase her chances of escape.
Lumian's body emerged from the shadows.
He glanced at Lugano, who had regained consciousness and stood up, and inwardly praised Amandina's keen spiritual perception. Then, he smiled at Amandina and said, "Surely you've noticed that we've been entering and exiting this house frequently over the past few days?
"What about you? How are you able to maintain your normal self-control?"
Amandina glanced at the house beside her, no longer puzzled by Lumian and the others' ability to remain lucid and rational.
She pursed her lips and said, "Robert took me on a date to Twanaku's place. I spent half the night here."

Camus's heart ached as he blurted out, "Robert knows what's special about this place?"
Amandina nodded nimbly.
"He knows the Dream Festival very well."
"What's his relationship with Twanaku?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.
Amandina pondered for a moment.
"I don't know. At the very least, I haven't noticed any romantic tension between them or any interactions."
What do you mean by romantic tension? Lumian didn't directly inquire about Mr. Robert's knowledge of the Dream Festival. Instead, he asked something else.
"Are you a Beyonder of the Evernight pathway?"
Amandina blinked and hesitantly said, "In a way..."
Upstairs, Camus inquired with concern, "Where did you obtain the potion formula and the corresponding ingredients?"
As they conversed, various movements and shouts echoed from the plantations outside the town and throughout the town.
Amandina's eyes darted around as she grinned and said, "Can I choose not to answer?""What do you think?" Lumian smiled at her.
Amandina didn't back down. She raised her head slightly and stared into Lumian's eyes without flinching.
She noticed that his smile remained unchanged, and his emerald-green yet deep eyes remained emotionless.
After more than ten seconds, Amandina averted her gaze and tilted her head slightly.
"I obtained it in this dream."
Camus, who was on the third floor, was taken aback. "You obtained it during the Dream Festival?"
He could understand obtaining a potion formula during the Dream Festival. While knowledge gains could be replicated in reality, could Beyonder ingredients used to concoct potions be brought from the dream to reality?
Could it be that after consuming a potion during the Dream Festival, one could also remain a Beyonder upon waking?
This subverted much of mysticism's common sense!
Without waiting for Amandina's confirmation, Camus thought of a possibility.
He immediately asked Amandina, "Are you a Beyonder only in this dream?"
Amandina wanted to play dumb, but after glancing at Louis Berry, who was looking at her with a faint smile, she said gloomily, "It's the same in reality, but I don't have many chances to showcase it."
How is this possible? Camus gazed down at Amandina, suspecting

that the mystical knowledge he had encountered since childhood was inaccurate.
He had considered the possibility that Amandina was lying, but he wasn't willing to doubt this girl who held a special place in his heart.
At that moment, Lumian spoke calmly to Amandina, his expression unperturbed, "You haven't consumed a potion, have you?"
Amandina's expression shifted slightly. She puffed up her cheeks and muttered, "Why are you still asking me if you already know..."
Haven't consumed a potion? Camus, Rhea, and Lugano were taken aback, but as they recalled their encounters, they gained a better understanding of Amandina's situation.
It's indeed a boon, but I'm not sure how it was accomplished...
Lumian silently smiled as Camus nervously asked Amandina, "Which evil god deceived you?"
Amandina was bewildered. "Evil god? What evil god?"
Before Camus could explain, Lumian asked thoughtfully,
"How did you obtain these supernatural abilities?"
Amandina scoffed.
"Why should I tell you?"
In the next moment, she saw Louis Berry reveal a smile that inexplicably terrified her.
"It's—it's Robert," Amandina said with a shiver. "He took me into the forest outside and led me to a huge black stone. He asked me to place my hand on it."
"And then you became a Beyonder?" Lugano interrupted Amandina with surprise and curiosity, failing to abide by his duty as a servant.
Amandina shook her head.
"Then I fell asleep—in the dream. When I woke up, I had superpowers."
"Is Robert also a Beyonder? Did he obtain his powers through the same method?" Camus pressed.
Amandina let out a soft sigh and said, "He's a Beyonder, but I don't know if he obtained his abilities the same way. He brought me on a date here. Before entering this dream, he was already a Beyonder."
Black boulder... Lumian emerged from the ground floor of Hisoka's house and asked Amandina with a smile, "Where's Robert? He's not having a date with you here?"
Amandina's expression shifted between anger and amusement as she replied, "He wanted to visit his other lover before coming to me."

"He has another lover? Who?" Camus asked, suddenly angry.
Amandina's eyes darted around, and she hesitated for a moment with a strange expression.
"Padre Cali."
"Uh..." "Huh?" Camus, Rhea, and Lugano couldn't help but exclaim in shock and confusion.
Even someone as well-read as Lumian couldn't help but raise his eyebrows.
Amandina spread her hands and said, "He does like women, but he prefers men.
"He said he brought me into the dream to obtain superpowers because he felt guilty towards me. He was also grateful that I was willing to help him keep it a secret and not break off the engagement, continuing to go out with him, make out with him, protecting his image even after knowing his other side."
At that moment, Camus and Rhea remained silent, but Lumian sensed the same meaning in their eyes.
You Intisians...
Amused, Lumian asked Amandina, "And you can accept that?"
Amandina pondered seriously. "Why not? As a marriage partner, Robert excels in status, wealth, strength, looks, and skills. In the Southern Continent, there aren't many better choices. Besides, we did have a beautiful relationship. He does love me, but he also loves Padre Cali."
Amandina smiled at Lumian and said, "He also promised me more freedom."
Upon hearing Amandina's response and looking at the youthful and beautiful girl, Camus, who was on the third floor, suddenly felt a pang of sorrow.
A certain beauty in his heart shattered.
Lumian glanced up at him and scoffed inwardly.
Hadn't he been mentally prepared to see the other side of Amandina? Amandina managed to express herself succinctly in a very self-controlled manner without demonstrating it.
Perhaps Amandina had deliberately said so much in front of Camus to prevent him from loving her out of pity.
Lumian turned to Amandina.
"In other words, Robert is currently in Saint-Sien Cathedral?"
"Yes." Amandina nodded.
Lumian tersely acknowledged her words and spoke in a commanding tone, "Then let's pay him and Padre Cali a 'visit.'"

Chapter 677: Last Year's Dream Festival

Amandina hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "You've already cornered me. What choice do I have?"

Her eyes flickered with an inexplicable excitement and curiosity as she spoke.

Her words seemed to convey a different message: I didn't want to. I had no intention of doing so. You forced me to go to Saint-Sien Cathedral! Hurry, let's go!

Are you trying to "broaden your horizons?" Lumian criticized but didn't expose her.

He pointed at Hisoka's house and said, "Before heading to Saint-Sien Cathedral, let's check this place first."

Amandina tersely acknowledged his words.

"Are you trying to find the source of its uniqueness?

"Give up. I checked during the last Dream Festival and just now, but I found nothing."

As she spoke, she followed Lumian at a brisk pace, anticipating what this seemingly formidable adventurer would discover.

Lumian reached the second floor of Hisoka's house, where Camus and Rhea were already waiting.

Surveying every corner, Lumian casually asked Amandina, "Are you familiar with Twanaku?"

Amandina wasn't surprised by the question. Since she was searching for the source of the abnormality in Twanaku's residence, she couldn't avoid gaining a better understanding of his situation. She shook her head and said,

"I'm not familiar with him. I've only encountered him once or twice.

"I was just a child when he lived in Tizamo. Most of the time, I studied at the Iris Grammar School in Port Pylos. Later, he only returned to Tizamo two or three times a year—spending a week each time."

It was evident that Amandina had secretly learned about Twanaku. After all, she had only entered the special dream because she had slept in his house. She had even remained fully lucid during the Dream Festival.

Without waiting for Lumian to ask a new question, Amandina glanced at him and added, "Twanaku returns every year for the Dream Festival.

"Last year, during the Dream Festival, when Robert and I returned from the black stone, we noticed someone approaching. We hid behind giant trees on both sides of the path and saw that it was Twanaku."

Twanaku is indeed connected to the black boulder. There are even traces of him or marks formed by extreme emotions and desires there... Lumian turned to Camus, who was watching him and Amandina stroll around the second floor, and pondered for a moment.
"Which month did Twanaku's house burn down, killing all his family members?"
Without waiting for Camus's response, Amandina exclaimed excitedly, "I know, I know!"
Yes, I'm asking you. Do you think I don't know when Twanaku transmigrated? Lumian smiled at Amandina, signaling her to respond.
He had a clear and detailed understanding of Twanaku's matters on the surface. He had deliberately asked Camus to elicit Amandina's answer.
He wanted to see if she would lie and if she had any further information.
Amandina said smugly, "Late December. It should be a few days after the Dream Festival."
As far as they knew, the Twanaku family likely perished during the Dream Festival. Upon returning to reality, their fates began to unravel, and they were taken away by the fiery disaster. The question is, why did this house leave behind an abnormality? What happened to the Twanaku family back then, or what had they done? As the bestowed of the Inevitability domain, Lumian found a term that was very Inevitability-like to summarize the phenomenon of those who died for various reasons in the next three months after dying in the Dream Festival and returning to reality.
Reining in fate!
Of course, he couldn't be certain that death in the Dream Festival would lead to death in reality. However, judging from Amandina's expression and tone, Lumian believed that she thought the same.
After searching the second floor and finding no differences from reality, Lumian ascended the stairs to the third floor. Amandina followed closely, her excitement showing that she finally had a chance to do what a Beyonder should do.
Lumian glanced at her and casually asked, "What left an impression on you during last year's Dream Festival?"
Amandina's excited expression darkened, as if she had been reminded of something unpleasant.
She covered her mouth and nose. After a few seconds, she said, "Robert and I discovered numerous cruelly murdered individuals in the town and various plantations. Their stomachs were ripped

open, and their internal organs were removed. They wore pained expressions, as if they had been tortured to death..."
"Serial Killer?" Camus, who had been listening intently to Louis Berry and Amandina's conversation, blurted out.
This reminded him of Twanaku.
Was this Desire Apostle venting his murderous desires during the Dream Festival to show restraint normally?
So that's how it is... Lumian roughly understood how Hisoka's advancement ritual had been completed.
Following the ritual, Hisoka had killed enough people in this realistic dream and devoured their internal organs. When he returned to reality, these people died one after another. From fate's perspective, they had indeed perished because of Hisoka's murder. This fulfilled the core requirements of the ritual. Hisoka only needed to truly devour a portion of the victims' internal organs before they were buried. He should be able to complete the ritual, consume the potion, and advance to Desire Apostle.
In reality, completing a series of murders and stealing a corpse's internal organs were two entirely different matters!
What puzzled Lumian was that according to Devilology, such an advancement ritual required a three-day interval between killings. Otherwise, it was easy to lose control. The maximum interval couldn't exceed nine days, or the ritual would reset.
Hisoka had clearly used the Dream Festival to complete all the killings in one night. When he returned to reality and the primitive tribe attacked, all the "condemned" people died on the same day. It didn't drag on until the next month. Lumian believed that it was due to the April Fool's prank. They had taken advantage of the chaos to send the deceased, whom the primitive tribe couldn't eliminate in time, to hell. This could be confirmed by the statements of the peripheral members of April Fool's.
In other words, the interval of no more than nine days was satisfied, but Lumian didn't know how Hisoka had achieved the criteria of exceeding three days.
Had he used the dream's uniqueness to avoid the three-day interval? When he killed someone in the dream, it hadn't been reflected in reality, so he wouldn't lose control so easily? As Lumian pondered Hisoka's advancement ritual, he circled the rooms on the third floor.
After searching the room where Twanaku slept, he smiled at Amandina and said, "Apart from the serial murders, what else did you encounter?"
Amandina pursed her lips and furrowed her brow. After a brief struggle, she grumbled, "If I cooperate, will I be awarded a medal

when I return to reality?"
Her father, Petit, had once received the Legion of Honor medal from Intis, so he was made a knight.
Without waiting for Lumian's response, Amandina continued, "I also encountered a woman who seemed like a lunatic.
"Back then, I wanted to visit the Brieu Motel to see how the gentlemen and ladies hunting in Tizamo would react in such a dream. I was looking forward to seeing their other side.
"When I reached one of the rooms, I heard a few people singing a strange song. Then, the crazy woman appeared behind Robert and me. She remained lucid.
"She was quite beautiful, but she was very crazy. Back then, I was like a child with a new toy. I always wanted to test my abilities. I felt that with Robert's cooperation, I could easily deal with most Beyonders. One controlled, and the other attacked.
"In the end... she captured the two of us. Robert was knocked out, stripped naked, and hung from the bell tower with a bunch of mosquitoes released beside him. I-I was hung in a cesspit, descending bit by bit..."
At this point, Amandina appeared on the verge of vomiting.
In Tizamo, other than the Brieu Motel, Saint-Sien Cathedral, the police headquarters, and a few other places, no one used a flush toilet.
Camus couldn't help but sympathize with Amandina as he imagined such a scene.
Mad Lady? Were the ones singing the peripheral members of April Fool's who participated in the Tizamo prank? Lumian circled the third-floor rooms and smiled at Amandina.
"And then?"
Amandina took a deep breath and said, "She also asked me why I stayed lucid. After I told her about Robert and Padre Cali, she happily ran to Saint-Sien Cathedral and completely forgot about me. After that, I gradually escaped my predicament."
With a nod, Lumian replied, "Let's go to Saint-Sien Cathedral now."
He planned to consider using the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth in Hisoka's house in the dream after obtaining more information from Padre Cali and Robert.
"Alright." Amandina tried her best to appear less eager, but she really wanted to see how Robert, her fiancé, interacted with Padre Cali.
The five of them left Hisoka's house and hurried towards Saint-Sien Cathedral. Lumian didn't use teleportation because he didn't want to waste his spirituality. He couldn't carry anyone with him in his flaming spear form either.

Fortunately, Tizamo wasn't large. They quickly followed the shadows by the roadside and returned to the intersection where the Brieu Motel stood amidst various cries.
Lumian pointed at the Brieu Motel and warned Amandina, "Don't go to the second floor of the Brieu Motel. Trust me, it'll be even more terrifying than what that crazy woman put you through."
Amandina's eyes narrowed as she said, "Okay."
The five of them turned onto another street, passing through the Bunia café, the police headquarters, and a small square before arriving outside Saint-Sien Cathedral.
Lumian wasn't in a hurry to enter. He circled to the side, pried open a stained-glass window, and peered inside.
He and Amandina, who had gathered beside him, nearly went "blind."
In the cathedral's hall, a handful of naked men knelt before the Eternal Blazing Sun's altar. They were all from the Northern Continent, including Amandina's fiancé, Robert.
Padre Cali, also naked, paced back and forth between Robert and the others with an excited expression, reciting, "He walks in the light, He sheds warmth, He illuminates the world..."
With each line, Padre Cali seemed to grow more animated, exhilarated in various ways.

Chapter 678: Absurd Orgy

Amandina scrutinized the naked preacher, Cali, from head to toe. Her gaze eventually settled on Robert, her fiancé, kneeling beside him.

The lad with brownish-yellow hair, his skin pale-white as if he had not been exposed to the sun for a long time, had abandoned his usual cold demeanor. He was equally excited, but he controlled himself and patiently waited for the padre to complete his preaching.

The other naked men grew increasingly restless, gradually stirring.

However, it was evident that they held Padre Cali in high esteem. Despite their disintegrating self-control, they refrained from directly initiating the orgy, only occasionally making small movements.

If God were watching, He would have incinerated all of them... As a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun, Amandina subconsciously wanted to kneel to the side and bow her head in repentance. What a blasphemous scene!

Holding the open Sun Bible, Padre Cali continued to impart the teachings of the Eternal Blazing Sun to the naked men with an abnormally excited expression.

"God says, the sun shines justly upon everyone..."

During the preaching, Padre Cali's gaze frequently swept across Robert and the other purebreds of the Northern Continent, their faces, chests, and lower bodies. His expression revealed uncontrollable satisfaction, pleasure, and enjoyment.

Lumian had always felt that he was well-read. In the past, he had disrupted the Church's holy operations, but the scene before him still exceeded his imagination, leaving him momentarily dumbfounded.

Are the padres of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church among the most "outstanding" Intisians?

In an instant, information about Padre Cali and the observations of the past few days appeared in Lumian's mind.

He's a native of Port Pylos, possessing pure West Balam bloodline and a lowly native of the Southern Continent. Starting as a cathedral servant, he had seized the opportunity to change his fate. Subsequently, he had worked diligently and eventually became the padre of Tizamo Town.

He yearns for higher status and more recognition, especially from those hailing from the Northern Continent...

Such long-standing desires have distorted the desires of Padre Cali.

Is he secretly targeting men from various countries in the Northern Continent, attempting to subdue them and gain his sought-after recognition?
Robert and the others are clearly relatively young. If Padre Cali had started doing such things a few years ago, they would still have been minors with immature minds. Tsk, you padres... As Lumian analyzed the current situation, he thought of his sister Aurore.
In Cordu, he had not liked entering the cathedral, attending Mass, or praying often. On the one hand, Aurore did not like it herself and set an example. On the other hand, Aurore had always been worried that Lumian, who was only twelve or thirteen years old at the beginning, would be alone with the clergyman in the cathedral. From time to time, she would use words like "Boys have to protect themselves" and "Many padres like boys."
Suppressing his sudden longing, Lumian looked at Padre Cali, who was still engrossed in his preaching. The more he preached, the more excited he became. Lumian felt that his analysis should be correct.
A lengthy holy sermon before a male orgy was clearly not something an ordinary person could come up with and put into practice. It was abnormally absurd.
However, considering that Padre Cali yearned for the Northern Continent gentlemen's recognition, especially given his identity as the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's padre, all of this became self-explanatory!
Poor Eternal Blazing Sun and Saint Sien. They have become an important prop for Padre Cali's performance art... Just as Lumian thought this, Padre Cali finally completed his "exciting" sermon.
He spread his arms and shouted, "Praise the Sun!"
Robert and the other lads, equally excited and naked, knelt on the ground, spread their arms, and sang in unison, "Praise the Sun! Praise His Grace!"
The Sun does not wish to be praised by you... His Grace... Yes, it aligns with the aspirations of Padre Cali for higher status. In this male orgy, he made all participants view him as an archbishop and preached to them... Finally, he would bestow the boon of God's holy spirit on these people? Lumian seemed to be able to imagine the ensuing scene.
Padre Cali turned around in satisfaction and solemnly placed the Bible back on the altar.
Then, he approached Robert, resembling an archbishop bestowing grace upon his believers.
The other men tangled with each other.
Camus, Rhea, and Lugano, who were observing the cathedral

through another stained-glass window, were equally stunned.
In particular, Rhea felt as if her eyes, brain, and soul had been tainted despite all her tragic experiences.
Upon regaining her senses, Rhea's anger surged.
Beside her, Lumian recalled a detail. He lowered his voice and asked Amandina, "When did Robert become lovers with Padre Cali?"
Amandina retracted her corrupted gaze and pondered for a moment.
"More than a year after Padre Cali arrived in Tizamo, about three years ago."
Lumian frowned and asked, "Did they become lovers in reality, or during the Dream Festival?"
"Of course in reality," Amandina replied without hesitation.
Something's off... Padre Cali had been in Tizamo for over a year. He should have mellowed, turned restrained, and been devoid of excessive desires and emotions. *Why was he still targeting Robert and the other lads?* From the looks of it, there is something abnormal about Padre Cali, and this abnormality should have been related to the source of the Dream Festival. That is why he had declared its beginning... Just as Lumian thought this, he saw Rhea raise her bow angrily and aim it at the cathedral, where the scene was becoming increasingly unbearable and foul.
Almost simultaneously, the energetic Padre Cali turned his body.
Suddenly, Lumian, with one hand in his pocket, saw the native padre with dark brown skin, sunken eyes, and thin black hair. His naked figure was reflected in Lumian's eyes.
He felt a chilling aura emanating from Padre Cali's body, attempting to completely freeze and replace his spirit.
Wraith Possession!
So, Padre Cali possesses the ability to transform into a Wraith. It is no wonder that when I investigated his weaknesses, I realized that it only existed deep within the body, within the spirit... Heh heh, a Wraith preaching in the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and under the sunlight... Who would have thought such a thing would happen? Padre Cali's Wraith powers definitely had not come from drinking potions. They would definitely have been discovered and purified... A boon? Lumian came to a realization.
Relying on the strength of his Sequence 5 Spirit Body, Lumian struggled to wrestle control of his body from Padre Cali.
He was not in a hurry to activate the Blood Emperor's aura brand. Instead, he looked at Amandina and said with difficulty, word by word, "Let... me... and... Cali... enter a dream..."
Lumian knew that Amandina's ability to forcefully pull people into

a dream could only be used one-on-one. However, Padre Cali was currently attached to him and entangled with his Spirit Body. Perhaps she could treat them as a unit.
As for whether Wraiths dreamed, Lumian did not know for now. After all, he still had a backup plan.
With a resounding crash, Rhea's arrow shattered the stained-glass window, sending shards crashing to the ground.
The arrow, entwined with silver-white lightning, crossed a distance of more than ten meters, pierced the location where Padre Cali had been, and nailed it to the wooden table with the candlestick.
Amidst crackling lightning, the long wooden table shattered and collapsed to the ground, sending burning candles tumbling in all directions.
Robert, clearly taken aback by the sudden departure of Padre Cali, reacted. He opened his mouth and uttered strange words in a strange language.
Ooo! As if a cold wind from the Feysac Empire's extreme north blew, a blurry, strange, and inhuman figure materialized out of thin air and burrowed into Robert's body.
A layer of armor-like ice materialized on Robert's body, and a colossal, sharp, and crystalline frost scythe materialized in his hand.
Clutching the massive scythe, Robert sprinted toward Rhea, Camus, and the others.
Wherever he passed, the ground froze, and icicles materialized on the walls.
...
On the fourth floor of the Brieu Motel, in a room near the intersection, two figures emerged from behind the curtains as Lumian and his companions made their way to the street where Saint-Sien Cathedral stood.
One of them was a man with distinct Northern Continent features. His dark-green eyes stood out against his dark gray formal suit and black silk top hat. The other was a woman with delicate skin, exquisite facial features, and deep blue eyes. She wore a light-colored dress that allowed for easy movement and a feathered hat adorned with pearls. They were the couple Lumian had seen moving into the Brieu Motel late at night.
They had arrived in Tizamo a mere ten minutes before the official Dream Festival began.
At that moment, the man and woman's eyes were clear, devoid of any excessive emotions or actions.
"The patrol team's sudden arrival in Tizamo is indeed because they

discovered the problem here," the beautiful woman said in a deep voice, gazing out the window at the street below. "From the looks of it, they've also found a way to remain lucid and rational in this special dream."

The man's expression was cold as he nodded slightly and said, "But they don't know much yet. They're moving in the wrong direction."

"Let's get moving." The woman in the feathered hat led the way to the door.

The two of them descended the stairs swiftly, one after the other.

As they passed the second floor, the woman in the light-colored dress suddenly stopped and whispered, "Do you hear something strange?"

The man in the half top hat listened intently for a few seconds before hearing faint chewing sounds coming from a room deep on the second floor.

The sound persisted without pause.

Chapter 679: Spirit Medium

Seeing Robert, clad in ice armor and dragging a frost scythe, sprinting towards the stained-glass window facing him, Rhea, and Lugano, Camus immediately drew his custom-made revolver and aimed it ahead.

At that moment, his feet turned cold, and his body froze, causing his joints to become sluggish and his wrists to tremble.

From the corner of his eye, Camus observed that although Robert hadn't truly approached, the frost on the ground and the icicles on the wall had already reached him.

Within a radius of ten to twenty meters, the chill intensified, resembling the extreme north.

With a swoosh, Rhea shot another arrow entwined with silver lightning.

Robert didn't dodge or evade. Exerting strength in his arms, he swung the frosty scythe forward.

Clang!

The scythe knocked away the arrow, leaving behind a small amount of lightning that raced towards Robert's body.

Amidst the sizzling sounds, Robert felt numb for a moment before continuing to sprint towards Rhea and the others.

Camus was taken aback.

He wasn't surprised that Robert could control the frost scythe so effortlessly and create a considerable frozen domain. Instead, he was surprised that Robert had rushed up to him and was about to enter a five-meter range.

Doesn't he know about my Psychic Piercing ability?

Doesn't he realize that Psychic Piercing's effective range is five meters?

Could it be that he has never encountered or fought a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Arbiter pathway?

That's true, Camus thought. No one in the patrol team or the Admiral Guard knows that Robert and Miss Amandina are Beyonders. After obtaining Beyonder powers during the Dream Festival, they probably don't use them much in the outside world. They can only unleash their full potential during the annual Dream Festival. There aren't many Beyonder enemies to choose from...

As these thoughts raced through Camus's mind, he seized the opportunity. As Robert stepped within five meters, his eyes lit up with brilliant lightning.

Psychic Piercing!

Two bolts of lightning shot out and pierced Robert's head.

Robert let out a blood-curdling scream and tumbled forward, writhing in pain.
He had tossed the frost scythe aside.
Rhea's arrow was once again nocked to the bowstring, instinctively following Robert's roll. Fury blazed in her eyes, erupting from within her body, and her muscles bulged with the surge of power.
Raging Blow.
This was the Raging Blow Rhea had accumulated through her anger.
It came from Sequence 8 Folk of Rage from the Sailor pathway. By releasing accumulated anger, her attack was greatly enhanced.
Rhea was currently at this Sequence, but the hunting bow in her hand was a powerful Beyonder item. It was a formidable weapon she had spent all her savings on before arriving in Tizamo. It was called Thunderclap Explosion and could be used for two years.
Soon, Robert ceased his tumbling, but he couldn't shake off the intense pain caused by Psychic Piercing. He froze in place for a moment.
Without hesitation, Rhea watched the arrow, engulfed in dazzling lightning, and released her grip on the bowstring.
The arrow shot out, but the lightning on it strangely split into two. One continued to ensnare the arrow, while the other darted to the right.
Wh-- Rhea's pupils dilated, unable to comprehend why such a thing had occurred.
Instinctively, she turned her head and followed the separated bolt of lightning to its destination.
Then, she saw Louis Berry leaning against the window, his eyes tightly shut as he slid down.
A few seconds ago, upon hearing Louis Berry's words, Amandina had locked onto him with a mix of confusion and excitement.
Since you said it, I won't stand on ceremony!
In her spiritual perception, Louis Berry's soul was intertwined with the sinister soul, fiercely resisting while using various parts of his body as a battlefield. However, the owner of the body was clearly at a disadvantage.
Amandina couldn't separate them under such circumstances.
She vaguely understood why Louis Berry had instructed her to lock onto the other party's head and entangled soul with her spirituality.
Lumian, who had Amandina use her abilities, stammered as he struggled to move his left hand in his pocket.
His left hand wasn't in his trouser pocket or shirt pocket, but in his Traveler's Bag.

After arriving outside Saint-Sien Cathedral and prying open the stained-glass window, Lumian had inserted his left hand into his Traveler's Bag, ready to retrieve a suitable mystical item at any moment.
He was preparing for the impending battle.
If this wasn't a dream, he would likely have his hand in his left shirt pocket--where Mr. K's finger was.
Before being fully controlled by the Wraith, Lumian relied on the strength of a Reaper's soul to struggle and retrieve a brooch from his Traveler's Bag.
It was the grayish-white, lightning-shaped brooch known as Fury of the Sea!
Lumian gripped the brooch tightly and observed Amandina leaning against the wall. She clenched her fists and closed her eyes.
His thoughts suddenly blurred, and his eyelids grew heavy.
He fell asleep and slowly slid down the wall.
Padre Cali fell silent in his body.
The Wraith appeared to be asleep as well. It was unknown if he would fall asleep on his own or if he was affected by the negative effect of now possessing a body.
Amandina opened her eyes and was delighted to see this. She wanted to praise herself.
With a crackling sound, the bolt of lightning detached from Rhea's arrow struck Lumian, transforming into numerous tiny electric serpents that slithered around him.
This was the downside of the Fury of the Sea brooch!
Even if Lumian only carried it, there was a high chance of being struck by lightning when he went out in the rain. And if he wore it without attacking anyone else, the likelihood of encountering such a thing would significantly increase.
Lumian believed that since the Fury of the Sea brooch had a chance of attracting lightning strikes on a rainy day, it held a special allure for lightning.
In such a situation, although it wasn't raining, what if there was another source of lightning nearby? *What would happen?*
There was a high chance that it would attract a portion of someone else's lightning!
Stimulated by the pain of the electric shock, Lumian, no longer affected by the Nightmare ability, snapped out of his dream. He regained his senses, but his body remained numb.
He experienced this, as did Padre Cali.
As soon as the Wraith regained consciousness, he instinctively detached from Lumian's body to distance himself from the harm of the electric current.

His face materialized on the nearest pane of glass, his form indistinct.
Seizing the moment, Lumian donned the grayish-white, lightning-shaped brooch and retrieved his revolver from his Traveler's Bag.
He raised his right hand, aiming at Wraith Cali, who remained in a daze. The Wraith's various colors reflected in Lumian's determined eyes.
The pallor rapidly expanded in Lumian's line of sight.
Bang!
Lumian calmly pulled the trigger, firing a yellow bullet.
As he did so, silver-white lightning flickered on the Fury of the Sea brooch, instantly entering the bullet and wrapping around its surface.
This was one of the brooch's abilities. It could grant the wearer an Electric Shock effect with every strike!
After temporarily losing the Pride Armor, this had become one of Lumian's most effective methods against soul-type creatures.
The yellow bullet, engulfed in silver-white lightning, struck the stained glass, shattering it and sending tiny electric currents in all directions.
However, it missed Padre Cali. As Lumian pulled the trigger, the Wraith vanished from the glass and instantly leaped onto the glass-like surface of the crystal chandelier high above the cathedral.
Mirror Blink!
On the other side, Rhea's arrow struck Robert with precision, emitting a resounding bang like a heavy object colliding.
Crack!
The ice armor covering Robert's body instantly cracked, shattering into fragments that fell to the ground.
Under the assault of crackling electric serpents, the blurry shadow attached to his body broke free and vanished into the void.
With the ice armor shielding him from most of the damage, Robert remained relatively unaffected. However, his chest tightened, and his body briefly went numb.
At that moment, he regretted not wearing clothes. The various ingredients needed for his spirit channeling were hidden in his clothes, such as Full Moon Essence Oil or Corpse Incense Medication.
There were very few spirits that could allow him to communicate safely without the use of materials. The one just now was the most powerful.
Seeing Camus's special revolver and Rhea's arrows aimed at him, Robert grew anxious. He thought of a spirit channeling method

that could be completed under such circumstances.
Frowning and fearing the pain, he bit the tip of his tongue.
Pfft!
He spat out the blood from the tip of his tongue mixed with his saliva, emitting a strange sound from his throat.
A pair of weathered, stone-like hands reached out from beneath the cathedral's stone bricks, seized Robert's body, and pulled him underground.
At some point in time, the ground had softened like a swamp, and the blood in the air abruptly vanished.
Camus's bullets and Rhea's arrows arrived one after another, but they only caused sparks on the stone bricks on the ground.
Spirit Medium? Camus used this opportunity to revise his judgment of Robert's pathway and Sequence.
He's actually not from the same pathway as Miss Amandina?
Hadn't he also obtained his superpowers from the black boulder?
Camus hastily took a few steps back, retrieved a cartridge bag, and began reloading the revolver.
As a member of Matani's authorities, obtaining Beyonder bullets with different effects was relatively easy, even though the patrol team wasn't wealthy or had much accumulation. After all, there was the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, the God of Steam and Machinery Church, the Church of Earth Mother, and numerous adventurers coming and going. Furthermore, the patrol team needed to be vigilant against certain branches of the Rose School of Thought and the Numinous Episcopate. They had to make targeted preparations.
Camus swiftly inserted the golden Purifying Bullets into the revolver's cylinder and snapped it shut.
At that moment, Padre Cali, who had leaped onto another stained glass window, reappeared.
He opened his mouth and emitted a piercing shriek that harmed one's eardrums and Spirit Body.
"Ah!"
Wraith Shriek!

Chapter 680: Combat Experience

Camus, who had just loaded the Purifying Bullets into his revolver cylinder, heard a sharp sound of static in his mind.

Before his eyes, the world seemed to separate from him, a chunk of transparent glass forming a barrier between him and reality. Under the Wraith's Shriek, cracks appeared on the glass, extending into the Spirit Body.

A faint shattering sound reverberated in the ears of Lumian, Rhea, Lugano, Amandina, Robert, who had just crawled out of the ground near the altar, and the other naked men frantically dodging. It brought sharp pain to their eardrums, blood to their noses, and agony from the depths of their souls.

Almost everyone froze in place, like fragile porcelain caught in an invisible storm.

The naked men, who appeared ordinary, fainted without a sound. Blood seeped from their eyes, nostrils, mouths, ears, and skin. However, Lumian, who had advanced to Sequence 5 Reaper, suffered the least damage and recovered the fastest.

Thin ice crystal arrows shot at him, their arrowheads flickering with a cold light.

In an instant, Lumian made a decision.

He didn't transform into a shadow creature or enter the shadows to dodge the damage, nor did he attempt to duck.

Instead, blazing white flames ignited over his body.

He transformed into a burning-white spear and hurled himself towards the stained-glass window closer to the door, facing the ice crystal arrows.

Padre Cali, with his dark brown skin and sinister expression, stood there.

Amandina was the second to recover from the Wraith's Shriek. She witnessed the majestic blazing-white flaming spear collide with the ice crystal arrows hurtling towards them.

Silently, a portion of the ice crystal arrows facing the blazing-white flaming spear evaporated into sizzling white gas, while the surrounding ones quickly melted and turned to steam.

White mist caused by water steam filled the air. Although the blazing white flaming spear had dimmed significantly and stopped burning violently, it still pierced through and headed straight for the stained glass that revealed Padre Cali's figure.

Similar ice crystal arrows pierced through the white mist, striking Amandina, Camus, Rhea, and Lugano. However, they either melted or shrunk significantly, reducing their speed.

Amandina and Camus, who had just escaped the Wraith's Shriek,

easily dodged. Although Rhea and Lugano couldn't react in time and were hit by the ice crystal arrows, they only felt a slight pain, as if a child had hit them with a snowball. It was a little painful, but mostly wet and cold.
They seized the opportunity to snap out of their daze, almost at the same time as Robert at the altar.
Crack!
The blazing-white flaming spear struck the stained glass, shattering it into countless pieces. However, Padre Cali had already leaped onto the window that Lumian had pried open, narrowly escaping the attack.
As the flames of the burning white spear dissipated, Lumian's figure emerged from the fading light.
Without hesitation, he ignited white flames once more, transforming into a majestic spear that shot towards the window where Padre Cali had appeared, determined to pursue his enemy.
He deliberately refrained from teleporting and repeatedly transformed into a flaming spear, hoping to lull Padre Cali into overlooking such possibilities. Then, at a critical moment, he would unexpectedly appear beside him and use the Spell of Harrumph, catching the Wraith off guard.
Otherwise, it would be challenging to catch a Wraith that could constantly jump through mirrored objects, using them as portals to evade capture.
Furthermore, Lumian knew that Wraiths could be considered spirit world creatures to a certain extent. They could also use the spirit world to complete teleportation, although they couldn't compare to spirit world creatures specialized in this area. Nevertheless, it wasn't an ability to be underestimated.
As the fireball spear hurtled toward the window Lumian had pried open, Robert rolled to the side of the altar where their clothes were, intending to retrieve the ingredients used for spirit channeling.
Swoosh!
An arrow pierced the stone bricks in front of him, forcing him to change the direction of his roll at the last moment, narrowly avoiding the projectile.
As soon as Rhea regained her composure, she aimed at Robert and launched an attack.
Both she and Camus believed that Louis Berry could handle Padre Cali on his own, so their mission was to restrain Robert and capture this key figure, preventing him from interfering in the battle.
As a gunshot rang out, Padre Cali's figure vanished from the

stained-glass window, leaving no trace of his presence.
The eyes of Amandina, who was nearby, reflected the image of the naked fallen padre.
Amandina wanted to resist, but her body quickly turned cold, gradually defying her will as an unknown force took control of her actions.
Amidst the sloshing sounds, Lumian's blazing-white flaming spear pierced through the stained glass and landed outside the cathedral, three to four meters away from Amandina, its heat radiating in the cool night air.
As the flames dissipated, Lumian appeared, clad in a golden straw hat, a white shirt, and a black vest.
At that moment, Amandina's hands had already "involuntarily" risen. The corners of her beautiful face curled into a sinister and smug smile.
Come on!
Attack me!
Amandina would be the first to be injured and die. If the body can't protect me, I can still jump and shift positions in time!
Padre Cali was wary of Amandina's ability to forcefully pull people into dreams, a power that could easily turn the tide of battle. This time, he chose to possess her instead of Louis Berry, an enemy at a higher Sequence, hoping to use her as a shield against Lumian's attacks.
As Padre Cali manipulated Amandina's body with a sinister and smug smile, he saw Louis Berry's lips curve into a radiant smile.
As a Wraith, Padre Cali had a strong spiritual premonition, and he suddenly sensed extreme danger.
"Ha!"
A pale-yellow light burst forth from Lumian's laughter and landed on Amandina, who stood three to four meters away, enveloping her spirit and Padre Cali, who couldn't use Mirror Blink in time.
Lumian honestly found it a pleasant surprise.
You know about Nightmare's abilities, but don't you know how to guard against the Spell of Harrumph?
Oh, you really don't. You don't know this ability, nor do you know that I'm capable of it.
However, as a Wraith, you can continuously "mirror- jump," yet you insist on attaching yourself to one of my teammates and remain within a few meters of me. What kind of belief is this?
Don't you have enough combat experience?
Even if you didn't know the Spell of Harrumph, you have to guard against abilities like Psychic Piercing!
Oh, you think Camus is far away, so there's no need to worry about

it. As a Sequence 5 of the Hunter pathway, how would I know this? Are you hoping to use me to quickly kill Amandina?
Haven't you considered the existence of mystical items?
My original plan was if I failed to finish you off after using teleportation to deliver the Spell of Harrumph and Cull, I would feign a strategic retreat and find a small space to set up the Bottle of Fiction. Then, when you caught up, I would fight you in a cramped and sealed space, just like how I dealt with Hisoka back then. To my surprise, you delivered yourself to me...
As Lumian criticized wildly, Padre Cali and Amandina fainted and collapsed to the ground.
Had it been during his battle with Hisoka some time ago, Lumian would have hastened to follow through with the subsequent steps. This was because the Spell of Harrumph couldn't render a Sequence 5 enemy unconscious for long. However, now that he had advanced to Sequence 5, his Spell of Harrumph had become significantly stronger. The time he could control a Wraith had increased, although it was still limited to a few seconds.
Lumian retrieved a few special bullets from his Traveler's Bag. They had been purchased through Camus from the patrol team.
Two Exorcism and two Purification Bullets, both golden in color.
Lumian swiftly loaded the four bullets into the cylinder of his revolver and aimed at Amandina, who lay on the ground.
Catching sight of this from the corner of his eye, Camus jumped in fright and shouted, "What are you doing?"
"Saving her," Lumian replied calmly.
Then, he pulled the trigger.
Bang!
The golden Exorcism Bullet struck Amandina's shoulder, causing her to bleed and emit a golden sunlight.
Amandina woke up in pain, and the apparition of Padre Cali detached from her body, his face warped under the "sunlight."
Originally, with the strength of the Exorcism Bullets, it would have been impossible to expel a Wraith from the victim's body in an instant. However, Padre Cali was unconscious and unable to react effectively.
Lumian raised his gun, his eyes reflecting the color on the surface of Padre Cali's Spirit Body. He locked onto the pallor that had become evident.
Bang!
A golden Purifying Bullet, imbued with Cull's power, struck the Wraith's forehead.
The apparition of Padre Cali froze as he "saw" the bullet shatter on its own, transforming into balls of golden holy flames that spread

throughout his body, igniting dust and his soul.
The bright, sun-like golden flames swiftly enveloped Padre Cali, causing him to let out a tragic scream.
This wasn't a Wraith Shriek, but it still made everyone's heads and ears hurt.
Lumian endured these sensations and calmly said to Amandina,
"Drag him into a dream and inquire about the source of the Dream Festival."
Padre Cali had already been subjected to Cull and was severely weakened, teetering on the brink of true death. Amandina could effectively restrain him!
"But..." Amandina's shoulder and head ached, but she didn't dare complain when she saw Louis Berry's cold and calm expression.
Lumian turned to Lugano and said, "Treat her gunshot wound."
"Alright." Lugano winced from the pain in his eardrums, but he still rushed over.
At that moment, Padre Cali, purified by the Cull, instinctively withdrew from his Wraith state and transformed back into a human to escape the ongoing damage.
Seeing this, Amandina took a deep breath, clenched her fists, and closed her eyes.
She and Padre Cali entered the dream at the same time.

Chapter 681: Tomb

Robert rejoiced that the two patrol team members dealing with him had also been affected by Padre Cali's scream.

He didn't know what had happened to his lover, nor could he confirm it. Enduring the swelling in his head and the pain in his eardrums, he rushed towards the altar.

Pfft!

Rhea's arrow struck the pile of clothes, but that wasn't Robert's destination—it was quite a distance away.

After landing on the ground, he rolled and hid behind the altar.

Rhea drew the bowstring again, but she didn't release the arrow immediately.

Robert's body was completely blocked by the altar, making it impossible for her to aim. As a devout believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, it was also impossible for her to use the hunting bow's unique abilities together with Raging Blow to directly shatter the altar.

Witnessing this, Camus, knowing his revolver's power was insufficient, leaped over the shattered stained-glass window and sprinted towards the altar.

After a brief moment of hesitation, Rhea raised her hunting bow and shot an arrow wrapped in lightning into the air.

The arrow flew high into the air before swiftly descending, bypassing the altar's obstruction and landing behind it.

Since she hadn't been able to aim properly, the arrow grazed Robert's body and struck a crevice between two stone slabs. A sizzling electric current dissipated, creeping over Robert's body and temporarily paralyzing him.

After breaking free, Robert abandoned the idea of retrieving his spirit channeling ingredients. He had no intention of saving his lover, Padre Cali.

He planned to bite the tip of his tongue again and complete the spirit channeling. With the special ability of the natural spirit, he could escape back to his plantation, where he still had plenty of spirituality-rich ingredients for backup.

At that moment, from the corner of his eye, he caught sight of Camus's light-colored pants and leather shoes with holes. He felt a whip formed by electric currents appear in his mind.

The whip struck his soul,

and Robert, crouched behind the altar, felt his knees buckle, and he collapsed, trembling as extreme numbness and pain surged through him simultaneously.

Whip of Pain!

Interrogator's Whip of Pain!
Camus rushed to Robert's side, leaned down, and delivered a left hook—one that more or less bore a personal grudge.
Bang!
Camus, skilled in interrogation techniques, inflicted pain on Robert without going overboard. Robert fainted, yet suffered no substantial harm.
After restraining Robert, Camus glanced at the naked man and selected nearby clothes to cover his private parts.
He then picked up Robert and returned to where Lumian and the others were.
At that moment, Lugano had already retrieved the bullet that had struck Amandina's shoulder, allowing the wound to contract and heal.
...
Padre Cali was dreaming of the interior of Saint-Sien Cathedral.
Dressed in a white robe with golden threads, he knelt before the altar, muttering with a pained expression, as if repenting.
Amandina, clad in a black hunting suit, approached Padre Cali down the aisle between the pews. Remembering Louis Berry's instructions, she asked, "What's the origin of this special dream?"
Padre Cali looked up, his face contorted as he replied, "That... that strange tomb."
"Tomb?" Amandina suspected the Dream Festival she had just attended was a sham.
What tomb?
Suddenly, a flash of inspiration flickered.
"That colossal, black boulder?"
It's actually a tomb?
Padre Cali nodded.
"Yes."
It's really a tomb... Intrigued, Amandina asked proactively, "Whose tomb is that? Why is it so special?"
Padre Cali remained kneeling, shaking his head.
"I don't know. Even the gravekeepers don't know. They only know their mission is to guard that strange ancient tomb."
"Gravekeepers? Who are they?" The more Amandina asked, the more she felt she didn't know about the Dream Festival.
Padre Cali looked up at Amandina and said, "The elders of the forest tribe."
"I see..." Amandina's mind raced with questions. She picked one and asked, "Did you take Robert to Twanaku's house to sleep and allow him to maintain his lucidity? Then, you took him to the ancient tomb where he obtained superpowers?"

"Yes." Padre Cali lowered his head, facing the altar, his voice laced with pain. "I'm sinful."
Just as I thought... Amandina inquired further, "How did you know you could obtain superpowers there? And how did you maintain lucidity? You've only been in Tizamo for about five years, and I grew up here," Amandina inquired further.
Blood vessels bulged from Padre Cali's neck. "Twanaku, Twanaku, bewitched me."
"He used his body to tempt you?" Amandina suddenly felt a surge of excitement.
Padre Cali was taken aback.
"He saw through my desire for status and recognition and gradually demonstrated his abilities. He also told me there was a way for me to quickly and easily obtain strength. And with great strength, I could do more for the Church and receive more rewards and recognition... That demon!"
Amandina asked in disappointment, "You were bewitched just like that?"
Padre Cali nodded slowly. "That's right. Twanaku needed someone to help him monitor the changes in the dream and host the Dream Festival after he left Tizamo. First, he got me to sleep at his house. Then, during the Dream Festival, he took me to that strange ancient tomb."
"Did you also obtain superpowers by touching that tomb?" Amandina asked casually.
Padre Cali shook his head again. "No, Twanaku opened a crack in the tomb and let me reach in..."
"What did you touch?" Amandina couldn't help but urge upon seeing Padre Cali's pause.
"I touched a hand—a cold hand without temperature. Then, I fainted. When I woke up, I had superpowers. I did it three more times during the subsequent Dream Festivals, eventually becoming a Wraith." Padre Cali recalled the situation, his face filled with uncontrollable fear—both of the cold hand and the ease with which he had obtained superpowers.
"The hand of the corpse in the tomb?" Amandina quickly reviewed what Padre Cali had said and thought of a problem. "Didn't you say there were gravekeepers? Why weren't we stopped when Robert and I went?"
Padre Cali's voice deepened.
"People who have lived in Tizamo for a long time often have a projection formed by suppressed emotions and desires in this special dream. They usually hide in the chaotic area brought by the tomb, at the edge of the dream. They watch over the ancient

tomb with the gravekeepers to protect it from others.
"When the Dream Festival begins, these projections will return to their true forms, forming complete Dream Festival participants who can no longer suppress their emotions and desires. As for the gravekeepers, it's unknown where they go."
Strange... Amandina was puzzled by the gravekeepers' whereabouts. She was a little worried.
After a moment of contemplation, she asked with concern, "Do I have a projection of emotions and desires in this dream?"
Padre Cali shook his head.
"No. You don't spend enough time in Tizamo every year. Even for those who originally formed a dream projection, once they leave this place long enough and stop suppressing themselves, the corresponding projection will gradually fade until it disappears.
"Those who can remain lucid in this dream will have their corresponding projections gradually dissipate over time. details."
"However, this lucidity isn't absolute. After the Dream Festival begins, everyone will have a tendency to flaunt their emotions and desires—including those who maintain their lucidity. However, they won't completely lose control like those who have fused with their dream self. They can continue restraining themselves like normal, their desires revealed in some details."
Amandina recalled her performance during the two Dream Festivals and revealed a look of enlightenment.
Initially, she believed that because this place was a dream, as long as no one died, it was equivalent to a game. That was why she appeared more self-centered and unrestrained than in reality. She didn't expect this to come from the effect of the Dream Festival.
Thankfully, I've always had self-control... Amandina had ticked off most of the questions that Louis Berry wanted clarified, leaving only those that the Padre Cali himself wasn't aware of. Thus, she changed the subject.
"You've already become a Wraith, yet you still dare to preach and host Mass...
"Aren't you concerned that God might notice you and unleash His wrath upon you, purifying you into ashes?"
Being in the Southern Continent, Amandina knew the power of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church better than many gentlemen and ladies in Trier. She had no doubts about the existence of God.
Moreover, over the past year, she had been diligently obtaining mysticism knowledge from Robert and the various sources she could come into contact with. She knew that the Rose School of Thought, the key characters of various terrifying rumors, was renowned for its numerous Wraiths, and Wraiths were most

afraid of sunlight that came with purification.
Padre Cali sighed and said, "I had such concerns, but Twanaku told me he had a way to help me hide a Wraith's power. Unless God watches this place personally, I won't be discovered."
"What is it?" Amandina asked curiously.
Padre Cali replied truthfully, "After touching the corpse in the tomb and obtaining superpowers, don't rush to leave. Touch the tomb itself again, the black boulder.
"This concealed all my superpowers. The effect will last for more than a year."
That's possible? What would happen if I touched the black boulder and then touched the corpse's hand? Amandina pondered for a moment and asked a question of personal concern, "How did you entice Robert? Why did he become your lover?"
Amandina sized him up but couldn't find anything about Padre Cali that attracted Robert, other than his strength.
Could love truly be blind?
Padre Cali fell silent for a moment before saying, "I ignited his desires, dismantling his self-control."
"You've never displayed such abilities..." Amandina hadn't noticed Padre Cali arousing any desires in the battle before.
Padre Cali's voice was once again tinged with pain. "I'm sinful. I'm praying to the Demon Twanaku mentioned..."
Before Padre Cali could finish, the entire dream suddenly trembled and collapsed inch by inch.

Chapter 682: Cull

Unable to control the dream anymore, Amandina opened her eyes and woke up.

Beside her, Padre Cali snapped out of his slumber, his human form once again becoming hazy and indistinct.

Instinctively, he transformed into a Wraith, as if losing all restraint. Stiff black hair even sprouted from his body.

Reflected in Padre Cali's eyes was Lumian's figure—Louis Berry, with his black hair, green eyes, and golden straw hat, holding a revolver aimed directly at the Wraith's forehead.

Bang!

Lumian smiled and pulled the trigger, a golden Purifying Bullet exploding from the muzzle and instantly heading straight for the pallor in the Wraith's forehead.

Cull!

Simultaneously, Lumian waved his empty left hand at Padre Cali, as if to say, "Bye, you won't be missed!"

The Purifying Bullet exploded, and golden flames instantly ignited the ethereal Padre Cali's entire body.

Padre Cali couldn't even scream, his agonized thoughts manifesting as an invisible gale sweeping outwards.

Lumian endured the backlash, watching with a grim smile as the enemy was consumed by the purifying flames, reduced to scattered ashes.

Lumian felt his Reaper potion digest a little more.

Using Cull to reap a powerful foe's life was a core principle for Reapers—the higher their Sequence and strength, the more potent the acting effect.

With the addition of Cull, the relatively ordinary and common Purifying Bullet ended the life of a Wraith with just two strikes.

Lumian found it inexplicably amusing to witness the true incineration of the Padre Cali.

Why do I always encounter fallen Eternal Blazing Sun padres and cleanse and purify them?

Is this repayment for my past faith?

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian glanced at the risen Amandina and asked with a smile, "What did he say?"

Amandina's first reaction was to check the wound on her shoulder. She exclaimed, "It's completely healed, not a trace left?"

If it weren't for her torn clothes and sore shoulder, she would have imagined herself to be uninjured.

Miss Amandina, don't act as if you've never seen the world. Although you're a believer in the Eternal Blazing Sun and won't

seek treatment from the clergyman of the Church of Earth Mother unless you are particularly ill, there are many Feynapotterians in Matani. Haven't you come into close contact with them? Lumian criticized her and looked at Amandina coldly without responding.
Lugano, on the other hand, saw the beautiful girl's reaction and explained smugly,
"That's the power of a Doctor from the Planter pathway."
Amandina expressed her gratitude, then recounted her conversation with Padre Cali while massaging her shoulder to relieve the lingering sourness.
At the end, she spat at the spot where his ashes had fallen.
"He became the Demon's mouthpiece, using its power to violate Robert and the others.
"Luckily, he preferred men. Otherwise..."
Recalling how she had frequented Saint-Sien Cathedral over the years and had been a girl with limited knowledge, far from adulthood, Amandina shuddered inwardly. She sympathized with Robert and the others, but she also felt fortunate.
Lumian had another question in mind.
Could Hisoka's Wraith abilities also originate from the Dream Festival and the strange black tomb, rather than a direct boon from the Mother Tree of Desire?
That would explain a few things better.
As far as Lumian knew, when evil god believers prayed for boons, they needed to perform a ritual and offer sacrifices. The higher the level of the boon they prayed for, the higher the requirement for the sacrifice, and the larger the ritual.
As a member of Port Pylos's patrol team, Hisoka could cover up one or two sacrifices, but it was difficult to suppress all the sacrificial incidents. It was just like how Hisoka had only completed one serial murder case in Port Pylos.
Previously, Lumian had believed that he had relied on Mad Lady's help to complete the sacrificial rituals in the Southern Continent's even more chaotic places. But now, it seemed that there was no need for such trouble. He just needed to touch the cold corpse once a year during the Dream Festival.
Hisoka and Padre Cali have participated in at least five Dream Festivals and have become Wraiths for some time, but they haven't made a breakthrough since then... Is this because the cold corpse can only bestow a boon up to Sequence 5? Did Hisoka obtain the large amount of gold and something from the Nois family's Demon to wait for this year's Dream Festival to complete the corresponding matters and obtain a higher boon? Lumian turned to Robert, who had been dragged nearby, and asked for

confirmation, "He's a Spirit Medium?"
"Yes," Amandina replied. "Padre Cali said Robert gained powers by touching that black boulder too. But why am I a Nightmare while he's a Spirit Medium?"
Higher-level, composite power... Just as the Great Mother can bestow three different powers, Apothecary, Planter, and Villain, respectively... Lumian wasn't surprised by this situation at all. Camus and Rhea were as puzzled as Amandina.
Lumian couldn't be bothered to explain this complicated and high-level problem. He turned around and said to Rhea,
"Your dream projection should still exist. Be careful from now on. The question now is whether the death of your dream projection will affect your life."
Rhea nodded thoughtfully.
Lumian shifted his gaze back to Robert, recalling the Demon that had assisted Padre Cali.
That should be the Nois family member who established a connection with Hisoka...
Demons don't do 'good deeds' for no reason. Whether it's establishing a connection with Hisoka or responding to the Padre Cali's ritual, it must have its own motives. Although witnessing a padre of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church gradually degenerate should be commendable and interesting for a Demon, this isn't a sufficient reason for its close involvement...
What does it want during the Dream Festival?
The cold corpse in the black ancient tomb can bestow a Prisoner pathway boon, and Prisoners are adjacent to the Criminal pathway which Demons are part of...
Lumian roughly grasped the situation and muttered to himself, "The crucial question now is, where do the gravekeepers go during the Dream Festival? Why aren't they protecting the black ancient tomb anymore?"
No one could answer him.
Seeing him staring at the unconscious Robert, Amandina hesitated before saying,
"Can you let him go? He's a victim too, don't kill him."
Am I a homicidal maniac in your eyes? Lumian replied with amusement, "As long as Robert doesn't seek revenge and try to kill me to avenge Padre Cali, I won't waste my spirituality on him."
Phew... Amandina sighed in relief, then muttered while rubbing her shoulder,
"You're so cold-blooded. I thought you'd kill me to deal with the padre. That shot hurt, you know!"
Lumian scoffed.

"Between being possessed by a Wraith until you die and getting shot, which would you have preferred?"
"I don't care what you think or the sacrifices—I made the right choice to save you, didn't I?"
Amandina, who was just grumbling out of habit, asked with interest upon hearing Lumian's response, "So you're willing to make big sacrifices and make correct choices to help important people?
"If, and I mean if, my desires were inflamed by a Demon and I'd become a monster without venting them, would you sacrifice yourself to help me?"
Lumian chuckled and said, "Don't have such unrealistic expectations of me. But don't worry, I'll find someone else willing to make that sacrifice for you."
His gaze swept over Camus, Lugano, and the unconscious Robert.
Amandina just muttered, "How lame..."
Camus inwardly sighed, feeling he'd escaped the beautiful dream world.
Lumian looked at Robert again and said to Amandina, "Wake him up and talk to him. I need a favor from him."
If Robert refused, Camus, the interrogation specialist, was there to persuade him.
"Alright," Amandina replied crisply, jolting Robert awake and informing her fiancé of their current predicament.
She consciously omitted mentioning Padre Cali's death to maintain the illusion that the Wraith had fled.
"Will you help if I let you go?" Robert asked warily as he struggled to his feet.
Lumian gestured to Camus and Rhea. "You may not trust me, but do you trust the patrol team?"
Robert fell silent for a moment before saying, "What's the favor?"
Lumian chuckled. "Go to Twanaku's house and do something for me."
...
Brieu Motel, second floor.
The man in the dark gray suit and the woman in the feathered hat heard soft chewing sounds coming from the corridor—a stark contrast to the shouts, cries, and moans echoing through the motel, as if it shouldn't be happening during the Dream Festival.
Suddenly, the chewing stopped.
Almost instantly, the man in the gray suit jumped up as if stabbed in the waist by a red-hot iron rod.
His face tense with sweat beading on his brow, he sprinted to the first floor, traversing the entire staircase in the blink of an eye.

He ran all the way out of the Brieu Motel to the intersection before stopping, his expression twisted with fear and lingering dread.
"What's wrong?" the woman in the light-colored dress asked, suddenly appearing beside him with confusion and seriousness.
The man in the dark gray suit panted heavily.
"Phew, phew, phew, didn't you feel it? That terrifying malice!
"The feeling of my heart being ripped out, my tongue torn away, my brain churned into thick soup..."

Chapter 683: Dance

Hearing her companion's words, the woman in the light-colored dress's expression turned solemn.

"I had a similar feeling, but it wasn't as specific as yours."

The man in the dark-gray suit visibly calmed down and glanced back over his shoulder.

"Let's hurry to our destination. There seem to be many abnormalities beyond our grasp here."

The woman in the light-colored dress gave a single nod of acknowledgment.

After ascertaining their direction, they quickened their pace and swiftly left the intersection behind them.

...

Lumian, wearing a golden straw hat, led Amandina, Robert, and the others back to the small square from the side of Saint-Sien Cathedral.

At that moment, Camus spotted figures lingering in the cemetery on the other side.

Startled, he focused his gaze and realized they were pale-white bones hung with tattered cloths and humanoid phantoms made of fine ashes. Many upright tombstones lay on the ground, and many graves had clearly suffered damage.

"The awakened dead?" Camus furrowed his brow and asked Amandina. "The Dream Festival can also awaken bones and ashes?"

Regardless of life or death, they had to celebrate the Dream Festival?

Amandina nodded nimbly.

"Isn't that normal? Robert obtained superpowers from the Corpse Collector pathway during the Dream Festival. That's the Death domain, so the Dream Festival itself has such—uh, characteristics."

Amandina was secretly pleased that her knowledge surpassed that of a seasoned patrol team member in this area. She consoled Camus, "Don't worry. The bones and shadows in the cemetery are very peaceful. They're completely different from the humans at the Dream Festival. As long as you don't approach them, they won't attack you. They'll only wander around their graves."

"Of course they're peaceful," Lumian, who was leading the way, chuckled. "They usually don't have emotions or desires to suppress. They won't form an intense projection in this dream."

The dead were emotionless!

Of course, excluding those who had perished with resentment and

hatred, those buried in Saint-Sien Cathedral's cemetery must have undergone purification.
"That's not funny." Amandina wanted to console her silent fiancé, but she felt she didn't have the right after witnessing his indecency and being complicit in killing his lover. Everything she said seemed hypocritical, so she had no choice but to speak to Louis Berry instead.
She muttered inwardly, Hmph, as his fiancée notarized in the cathedral, it's my legitimate right to punish my fiancé's lover. It's a little overboard, but in the face of the blasphemer, the demon who preyed on a minor, being a little overboard is a revelation from God!
The more she thought about it, the more right she felt.
Lumian walked swiftly along the shadows beside the road. After some thought, he said, "Will those killed during the Dream Festival awaken and become undead?"
"Yes, but it takes a long time. I've only encountered them near the end of the Dream Festival. They're cold and aggressive," Amandina recalled.
Seizing the opportunity, Rhea asked, "When will the Dream Festival end?"
Amandina replied with a smile, "Haven't you noticed? The wall clocks and pocket watches are still ticking. The Dream Festival ends just before dawn."
"Is there a way to leave the Dream Festival early?" Lugano was concerned over this question.
Amandina glanced at Robert, who remained silent.
"There's no way. We can usually escape by sleeping in Twanaku's house and being stimulated at the edge of the dream. Once the Dream Festival begins, we can only wait for it to end naturally."
Lugano shut his mouth in disappointment and unconsciously took two steps closer to Lumian.
Camus observed Amandina's brisk strides and fell silent for a few seconds before asking, "Aren't you going back to Palm Manor to protect your parents? Aren't you worried they'll die during the Dream Festival?"
Amandina pursed her lips and said with a complicated smile, "During last year's Dream Festival, I rushed back to protect them. I didn't expect them to have a 'happy' time and not be in any danger...
"My mother prefers the lowest-class, filthiest, yet relatively muscular slaves to do the deed while she curses them. I don't know what mental issues that stems from or which areas that indulges, but this way, the male slaves definitely won't kill her.

Instead, her jealous lady's maids and female slaves who get too close will be subdued and forced to join if they approach.
"As for my father, he relied on his career in the Southern Continent to obtain the Legion of Honor medal. When awake, he's always afraid of attacks and slave riots. He built several bunkers in the manor and stockpiled food and weapons. He constantly practices combat, shooting, and military tactics. Even during the Dream Festival, it would be very difficult for the servants and slaves to take him down. They'd have to break through layers of defenses until he retreats to a bunker."
"Unless a Beyonder deliberately goes after them, they'll be very safe. If I stayed to protect them, it might be more dangerous—I mean I'm more dangerous. I might not tolerate the 'love' of those men or the jealousy of those women. I don't wish to kill too many people either."
Could it be that she's more afraid of sensing the malice hidden in her family and friends' hearts during the unconstrained Dream Festival? She'd rather gallivant outside and see others' dark sides than experience that herself? Lumian could understand Amandina's rationale.
He dropped the subject and turned to the silent Robert. "How different is your spirit channeling during the Dream Festival from usual? Will those spirits become more violent and difficult to communicate with?"
Robert, now in a white shirt and black pants, was silent for a few seconds before saying, "It's no different."
Could the excessive emotions and desires of the special dream exclusively target living creatures, leaving spirits unaffected by their typical lack of self-control? Or is the spirit world and its denizens fake—part of the dream aligning with Robert's imagination? It's likely the latter possibility. Spirit Mediums don't just connect with local spirits to borrow power. Robert didn't say some channeling was impossible in the dream... As Lumian's thoughts raced, he made a speculation.
Lumian led Camus and the others through the intersection, quickly returning to Twanaku's house.
He had asked about spirit channeling because it closely related to what he planned to do.
Standing on the second floor of Hisoka's house, Lumian said to the cold and slightly effeminate Robert, "Have you ever completed a spirit channeling here?"
"I've tried. I can establish connections with surrounding spirits, but there's nothing special about it," Robert replied honestly.
Amandina chimed in, "He tried it in reality, in the dream, and

during the Dream Festival.
"We're all curious about this place's uniqueness and want to figure out the reason, but those spirits don't know anything about it."
Lumian nodded, took out his golden pocket watch, glanced at it, and said, "Come up to me in two minutes and help me with a designated spirit channeling. All of you can come up."
Robert breathed a relieved sigh, realizing he wouldn't face this alone.
On the third floor, in Hisoka's bedroom, Lumian spread his arms and performed the Dancer's Summoning Dance once more.
Previously, using the Mystery Prying Glasses in the real world, he realized this place had a mysterious connection to the black boulder. Just now, Padre Cali had mentioned that the black boulder was actually an ancient tomb—the source of his, Robert's, Amandina's, and even "Hisoka" Twanaku's superpowers, as well as the Dream Festival itself.
In that case, performing the Summoning Dance in Hisoka's house might attract special, strange items connected to the black ancient tomb. Perhaps he could obtain important information about the tomb or the corpse inside.
It was much safer than using the Mystery Prying Glasses or dancing after reaching the tomb.
Furthermore, Lumian had no intention of directly attaching any summoned entity to himself. He had enlisted Robert's help to ensure safer, more effective spirit channeling.
A Spirit Medium could communicate with surrounding spirits or through specific directions and descriptions. However, they couldn't rely on the Summoning Dance and a location's uniqueness to attract more distant, hidden spirits like a Dancer could. A Spirit Medium could borrow spirits' power to achieve supernatural effects and communicate with them in detail. A Dancer could choose to obtain a trait, ability, or limited memory fragment.
Amidst Lumian's contorted, sonorous, bizarre dance, his spirituality combined with the environment's unique power, spreading in all directions. As the intense dance neared its climax, something finally emerged from underground and condensed on the glass-enclosed window.
A human-like shadow wore a black robe, strikingly resembling the tomb keeper Lumian encountered at the dream's edge, yet with differences.
The hooded face seemed fixated on Lumian, eager yet sensing The Fool's seal and the Blood Emperor's residual aura, not daring to truly possess him.

Lumian didn't force orders. He continued the Summoning Dance until Robert and the others arrived, then slowed to a halt.
During this, he pointed at the black-robed figure and told Robert, "Hurry up and communicate with it."
Robert nodded slightly, retrieving a bottle of Full Moon Essence Oil from his pocket.

Chapter 684: Two Answers

Observing Louis Berry's peculiar sacrificial dance drawing to a close, Robert wasted no time. He hastily poured some Full Moon Essence Oil into his palm, utilizing his abilities to fuse it with his spirituality and rapidly dissipate it.

Camus, Amandina, and the others immediately caught a refreshing, psychedelic fragrance. They felt their spirits were drunk, about to float out of their bodies.

Robert's voice echoed softly, distantly in their ears, causing their thoughts to drift farther and farther away. Fortunately, they weren't channeling targets, so they managed relative control.

The black-robed figure gradually left the glass window, approaching Robert.

Suddenly, the shadow vanished. Robert lowered his head, then slowly looked up, his face tainted by the night sky yet with an obvious sinister aura. His eyes were dark.

Observing this, Lumian ended the Summoning Dance, positioning himself three meters from Robert.

Although he'd intended for Robert to channel the spirit directly while he provided questions, the peculiar shadow had instead attached itself to Robert.

This too was a form of spirit channeling—many Spirit Mediums allowed a target's spirit to communicate through their mouth, answering certain people's questions.

Gazing at the sinister-looking Robert, Lumian pondered briefly, then said, "Do you know what happened to the people who lived here six years ago?"

He planned to start simple, least likely to cause anomalies, constantly adjusting direction, tone, and terminology based on the actual situation.

Robert opened his mouth, letting out a shrill voice unlike his own.

"Affected, performed a ritual, all perished."

This answer puzzled the others, including Camus, unsure if significant information was hidden.

Apart from Lugano, everyone guessed Louis asked about the fire engulfing the Twanaku family, with the spirit's answer implying a cult or evil gods' influence.

As a Conspirer, relevant information instantly surfaced in Lumian's mind.

The suppressed emotions and desires of everyone in Tizamo would be absorbed by the dream, gradually accumulating to form corresponding dream projections.

Like the gravekeepers, these projections would hide in the dream's

chaotic zone, guarding the black ancient tomb.
In previous explorations, I saw the black-robed gravekeeper and projections surrounding the ancient tomb in dream fragments. One projection was the remaining figure of "Hisoka" Twanaku.
"Hisoka" Twanaku returned to Tizamo two or three times yearly for about a week.
After leaving, his corresponding projection would gradually fade until vanishing.
"Hisoka" Twanaku had become a Devil pathway Beyonder after the fire incident.
The Nois family's Demon...
This information appeared simultaneously in Lumian's mind, like disconnected nodes in a spider's web.
Soon, Lumian made a guess.
"Hisoka" Twanaku returned to Tizamo once or twice outside the Dream Festival, each visit lasting a week or more? Was this to ensure his dream projection didn't completely disappear, allowing the dream to absorb some of his malice?"
Do the projections and gravekeepers stay around the ancient tomb because it has something special that unknowingly affects them, like the tomb or the cold corpse inside?
If sacrificial rituals were part of the tomb's defense, when the Dream Festival commences and the projections return to their bodies, would some deeply affected humans attempt to imitate the gravekeeper's actions and perform a ritual? If they failed, would their entire family perish, corrupting the house and forming a subtle connection to the black ancient tomb?
Yes, that's a possibility, but I can't fit the Nois family's Demon or Hisoka becoming a Devil pathway Beyonder into this web of information...
What would happen if I inserted that?
Lumian's heart stirred as he considered another possibility.
It wasn't just the black ancient tomb or its cold corpse affecting the Twanaku family. The Nois family's Demon was also affected!
Perhaps the Demon had been coveting the corpse or the source of abnormality. For this reason, it secretly influenced the Twanaku family, giving them knowledge. Once the Dream Festival began, through its influence in the real world, it magnified their corresponding desires in the dream. Coupled with the loss of self-control and wild indulgence brought by the Dream Festival, the Twanaku family took the initiative to attempt the sacrificial process from the ritual or dream projection given by the Demon, leading to subsequent abnormalities?
Had the Demon discovered Hisoka's uniqueness and lured him to

the Devil pathway?
Yes, this explains why only the Twanaku family did such a thing when everyone has a dream projection and why is this house unique enough to allow lucid dreaming...
The next crucial task is guarding against the Demon. It probably can't participate personally, but its minions would definitely appear...
As these thoughts raced, Lumian gained a deeper understanding of the situation.
He looked at the shadow possessing Robert and changed his question.
"Where are the gravekeepers? Where have they gone?"
Robert's shadowed face replied shrilly, "Dream Festival begins, the tomb opens. Need to hide."
Need to hide? After commencement, does the tomb become abnormally dangerous or pose a hidden danger to the gravekeepers? Lumian glanced at Amandina. This lady, Robert, and Padre Cali arrived at the black ancient tomb during the Dream Festival, easily obtaining powers through contact.
Where is this hidden danger? How is it dangerous? And where are the gravekeepers?
Something must be amiss.
Amandina felt inexplicable fear under Louis Berry's gaze. Her voice trembled as she asked, "Is there a problem with this answer?"
Lumian chuckled. "The gravekeepers need to hide. Why didn't you two?"
Before Amandina could delve deeper, she saw Robert's cold, dark face contort in agony.
Seeing this, Lumian sighed, "End the spirit channeling."
If it continued, something would happen to Robert.
Robert retained complete autonomy and a certain mobility level. He immediately uttered two words in ancient Hermes to make the spirit leave his body.
The shadow attached to him remained unresponsive, and the agony on his face intensified.
Slowly, Robert drew a dagger and stabbed his finger.
Drops of bright red blood, mixed with his Spirit Medium spirituality, sprayed towards the window like bead chains.
While doing so, Robert bellowed in ancient Hermes, "Leave!"
The black-robed shadow detached from Robert's body, chasing after the blood and vanishing from the glass window.
Witnessing this, Lumian retracted his consciousness from his right hand, no longer preparing any "snorting."
He breathed a relieved sigh and said to Camus, Amandina, and the

others, "Wait for me on the second floor."
"What now..." Amandina muttered, turning to head downstairs.
In just over ten seconds, silence returned to the third floor.
Lumian retrieved ingredients from his Traveler's Bag and set up a ritual, attempting to summon Madam Magician's messenger.
Unfortunately, being a dream prevented success.
Having anticipated this, Lumian wasn't overly disappointed. Though the early Dream Festival arrival prevented reporting the latest situation to Madam Magician, adding significant risks, such problems were bound to arise. He was mentally prepared.
Though Hunters liked to plan ahead, they weren't afraid of battle.
Lumian was even a little excited, not just from the Dream Festival's faint influence.
After stowing his belongings, Lumian descended to the second floor and said directly to Robert and Amandina, "Which one of you will take me to the black boulder?"
He had analyzed their situations, realizing that Amandina, Robert, and Padre Cali had easily arrived at the black ancient tomb and obtained powers, all led by those who had touched it.
Of course, they shared more than one thing in common.
Robert fell silent, wanting to say "Didn't you promise to let me go after helping?" but not daring.
Amandina glanced at the silent Robert, pursed her lips and said to Lumian, "Me!"
Then, she added, "I want to see if I can obtain more superpowers."
Lumian nodded and told Robert, "You may leave."
Robert glanced at Lumian, then Amandina. Without a word, he walked out of Twanaku's house.
"Gosh, he might think I brought you to the cathedral to deal with Padre Cali and embarrass him. Gosh, I was the one who brought you there," Amandina exclaimed after Robert left.
Rhea, who had already picked up most arrows, earnestly consoled her, "But you purified the cathedral for God. Praise the Sun!"
Amandina spread her arms as well. "Praise the Sun!"
After their exchange, Lumian said to Camus and Rhea, "Next, I'm going to the black ancient tomb. It's up to you to decide if you want to go."
"I..."Lugano tried to speak, but Lumian interrupted with a smile. "You must go."
Lugano shut his mouth.
Camus and Rhea exchanged glances and spoke in unison, "I'm coming too."
Lumian didn't persuade them, simply nodding. "Then let's set off now."

Chapter 685: Illusion

Outside Tizamo, near the entrance to the forest, Lumian and his companions heard gunshots and shouts echoing from the direction of the military camp. The population was denser here compared to the town and plantations, and more heavily armed. Many lives were lost each year in this area.

Camus retracted his gaze and let out a sigh of resignation, like a world-weary middle-aged man. He knew he was powerless to stop the violence. His only hope was to find a way to end the Dream Festival as quickly as possible, so that more people might survive. This was why he had chosen to follow Louis Berry to the black ancient tomb.

If Camus were alone, the rational choice would be to find a secluded corner and hide until dawn, until the Dream Festival concluded—just like Kolobo planned to do. However, after witnessing Louis Berry's formidable strength and realizing the adventurer was willing to take the risk of approaching the black ancient tomb, Camus felt compelled to take action himself.

Lumian gazed ahead, trailing Amandina's light footsteps as she turned onto a narrow path threading into the forest. He harbored no illusions about single-handedly putting an end to the Dream Festival. His objectives for this mission had always been clear: Find the gold Hisoka had obtained, along with the item he had procured from the Nois family's Demon. Uncover what the key April Fool's member was scheming, to prevent Hisoka's legacy from materializing.

This was both the duty of a Tarot Club Minor Arcana card holder, and a reflection of Lumian's wariness towards Hisoka. After discovering the dream projection Hisoka had left behind, Lumian feared his adversary might exploit pre-arranged measures and the dream projection to resurrect himself to some degree during the Dream Festival, returning to the real world as a Wraith or evil spirit.

He was determined not to give Hisoka that chance.

After hearing Padre Cali's confession, Lumian's suspicions only intensified.

Hisoka returned to Tizamo each year to participate in the Dream Festival. He required no other host, and this unique dream usually proceeded without any abnormalities. It didn't appear that anyone needed to constantly monitor it.

It was important to note that prior to the fire that wiped out Hisoka's family, the special dream had existed for innumerable years. The Dream Festival had taken place countless times, yet no

one had detected anything amiss. Under such conditions, the more individuals who knew the truth, the greater the danger of the information leaking out. Nevertheless, Hisoka still enticed Padre Cali and guided him to the black ancient tomb to acquire Beyonder powers.

This anomalous conduct led Lumian to surmise that Hisoka Twanaku had enlisted Padre Cali's aid in monitoring the dream to verify the status of his dream projection.

The dream projection would gradually dissipate as Hisoka departed Tizamo, ultimately vanishing altogether. If Hisoka desired its continued existence, he would need to return for a time after it had faded to a certain point. Given that the dreams surrounding the black boulder were typically in a state of disarray, the rate at which the dream projection dissipated might be erratic. This necessitated daily monitoring. As soon as the situation was deemed to have deteriorated, an urgent telegram would be dispatched to summon Hisoka back.

Naturally, as a Devil, Hisoka would never divulge his true intentions to Padre Cali. He would undoubtedly be on guard against Padre Cali exploiting the dream projection to eliminate this lurking threat. When instructing Padre Cali on what needed to be done, there was a high probability Hisoka was really having him monitor the shifting dynamics within the dream.

How could Padre Cali keep tabs on the evolving dream? Through the dream projections and the condition of the gravekeepers beside the black ancient tomb!

Regrettably, Lumian couldn't enter the dream himself. He could only entrust Amandina with questioning Padre Cali. The intelligence gleaned was superficial, not delving into the crux of the matter. It could merely aid in analysis.

If he had interrogated Padre Cali directly, he would have been able to roughly ascertain Hisoka's objective, rather than just harboring suspicions.

At present, the leads concerning the gold and the Demon's gift both pointed to the black ancient tomb. Lumian naturally had to investigate and do what he could. If the challenge truly proved insurmountable, he would decisively retreat to Tizamo and conceal himself on the third or fourth floor of the Brieu Motel, allowing the "danger" to confront Ludwig, whose appetite had grown voracious.

Amandina guided Lumian and the others through the rainforest, drawing near to the boundary of the dream.

Abruptly, Lumian raised his right hand and whispered, "Stop."

He sniffed the air, detecting the unmistakable scent of blood.

With a Reaper's keen sense of smell and meticulous nature, Lumian could discern that the blood didn't originate from jungle animals hunting each other. It was human blood, rich in spirituality.
"What's wrong?" Amandina asked, taken aback, as if recalling her first venture into this forest with Robert.
Camus quickly sensed the problem and pointed in the direction of the blood's scent.
"Something's not right over there."
Insects were gathering in that area.
Although Lumian was eager to reach the black ancient tomb to thwart Hisoka's plan, he knew that the more impatient he felt, the more cautious he needed to be. He had to remain vigilant of any abnormalities along the way to avoid walking into someone's trap or missing crucial information and rashly starting a conflict.
Aurore had once mentioned that Emperor Roselle might have said that haste makes waste.
Lumian walked towards the source of the blood's scent at a measured pace.
As he drew closer, he caught a whiff of the pungent odor of blood mingled with decay.
The latter originated from the tranquil essential oil used to repel mosquitoes.
Lumian circled a few more trees crawling with poisonous insects and saw a corpse lying face-up on the humus soil.
The corpse's eyes were wide open, and its black hair was disheveled. Its face was smeared with white paint. It was Maslow, the captain of the Tizamo patrol team!
At the beginning of the Dream Festival, Maslow, who had "disappeared" behind Lumian, had reappeared in the forest as a corpse!
"Maslow!" Camus and Rhea exclaimed in surprise.
Before they could fully process their grief, Lumian's gaze shifted downward as he examined Maslow's cause of death.
The captain of the local patrol team had deep wounds on his chest and abdomen, as if he had been attacked by spears, triangular blades, and other weapons, but the edges showed signs of tearing.
Large amounts of blood had already flowed into the ground, attracting lingering mosquitoes. There were obvious signs of decay on Maslow's body, and a yellowish-green liquid seeped out, as if he had been dead for two to three days.
After ascertaining the situation on the corpse's surface and examining the surrounding battle traces, Camus said in a somber voice, "Attacked by the power of the Death domain..."

Death domain? The image of a cold, middle-aged man in a thin suit suddenly surfaced in Lumian's mind.
Reaza, the vice-captain of Port Pylos's patrol team!
He was a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Death pathway!
At the beginning of the Dream Festival, Reaza had "disappeared" along with Maslow.
Camus glanced at Rhea, who wore a pained expression, and hesitantly said, "They were affected by the Dream Festival and lost control of themselves. They attacked each other. One died, and the other escaped?"
This was the most plausible conjecture for the Dream Festival.
Lumian imagined a similar scene, but he frowned in confusion and said, "Why are they in the jungle?"
Shouldn't they appear where they were in the real world?
In reality, Reaza and Maslow had already returned to Tizamo with me...
Did something lure them into the forest?
As the only member of the Port Pylos patrol team supporting Tizamo, Reaza had known from the beginning that something was amiss here. Was the true target the black ancient tomb?
Lumian looked at Camus and Rhea thoughtfully and casually asked, "Were Maslow and Reaza on good terms?"
"Excellent terms," Camus replied with a sigh. "Captain Reaza recruited Maslow into the patrol team and provided him with extensive guidance."
Lumian fell silent for a moment before saying to Amandina and the others, "Let's continue forward."
Rhea and Camus seized the moment to gather some branches to cover Maslow's corpse. Then, they quickly followed the team.
After walking along the forest path for a while, Amandina suddenly slowed her pace and pressed her hand to the side of her head.
"What's wrong?" Lumian asked keenly.
Amandina frowned and said, "My head feels a bit heavy, and I'm experiencing hallucinations."
"What kind of hallucinations?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.
Amandina replied in puzzlement, "I saw the black boulder I touched previously—no, the black ancient tomb. It felt like I had returned to the past. Do you understand? The past appeared in my mind in the form of an illusion, in front of my eyes, beside my ears."
Lumian pondered for a moment before saying, preempting Camus, "Let's go a little further and see what happens."
The hallucinations didn't incite Amandina's desire to retreat. With

an experimental mindset, she followed the familiar jungle path for another few dozen meters.
"How is it?" Lumian, who was beside her, inquired.
Amandina organized her thoughts and said, "The hallucinations are becoming clearer and more pronounced."
"The closer you get to the black ancient tomb, the stronger the hallucinations become?" Lumian suggested a possibility before asking, "Did anything similar happen to Robert when he brought you here last time?"
"No," Amandina replied with certainty. "He was quite normal the entire time."
Camus speculated, "Perhaps he had already grown accustomed to the hallucinations after approaching more than once."
"Who knows..." Amandina muttered and looked at Louis Berry. "What should we do now?"
It's not a big deal if it's just hallucinations... Lumian pondered for a moment and said, "Let's continue forward."
"Alright." Amandina wasn't sure what the hallucinations represented. She endured the discomfort and said, "We'll reach the ancient tomb in a few minutes."
She continued forward.
As they walked, Amandina suddenly extended her right hand and pressed it against the forest trees beside her, bending her back.
Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, she recounted the changes in the hallucination and spoke intermittently, "I see myself... after touching the ancient tomb last time... I didn't... I didn't fall asleep immediately... I... I was still awake!"
"I... I see... someone ahead!"

Chapter 686: Illusion and Reality

"What kind of person?" Lumian perked up.

He hadn't expected Amandina's hallucination to yield unexpected insights.

"I can't see clearly, I can't. It's not that he isn't clear... It's just that I can't make out the details." Amandina straightened up again, as if she had recovered slightly.

She pondered for a moment and said, "So I didn't fall asleep immediately after touching the black boulder—no, the black ancient tomb. When I woke up, I realized that I had gained superpowers. There were still some events that transpired in between, but I don't remember them at all. It felt like I had fallen asleep.

"The hallucinations I'm experiencing might have originated from the depths of my subconscious, from forgotten memories. No, not forgotten. They're just in a deep slumber. They're starting to become active and awakening bit by bit..."

Amandina carefully assessed her condition, searching for the source of the abnormality.

Pretty smart with a good attitude. She managed to maintain basic composure... Lumian evaluated inwardly.

Amandina's behavior was unfamiliar to Camus.

In his impression, Amandina was not only beautiful but also cheerful, optimistic, and lively. She was the kind of girl who could infect those around her with joy. However, due to her young age, she still appeared naive, childish, and inexperienced.

Unexpectedly, after their encounter in the Dream Festival, she gradually displayed an openness, maturity, and calmness he hadn't anticipated.

Amandina was puzzled.

"Why didn't Robert mention any dormant memories or the fact that I didn't fall asleep immediately after touching the ancient tomb? Padre Cali also talked about fainting and awakening with superpowers.

"The number of times they have participated in the Dream Festival in their lucid state and visited the black ancient tomb must have been more than mine..."

Lumian understood what Amandina was trying to convey.

Firstly, why did Padre Cali and Robert, who had been to the black ancient tomb many times, still believe that they had fainted on the spot and regained superpowers upon waking up? Why didn't they experience hallucinations similar to Amandina's?

Secondly, Robert had seen Amandina touch the black ancient

tomb. Didn't he know if she had fallen to the ground or not?
Lumian pondered for a few seconds and said, "Perhaps the person you see standing in front of you has caused the relevant memories to fall into a deep slumber. And you're from the Evernight pathway, a Nightmare. Therefore, there's something special about dreams and slumber. The closer you get to the black ancient tomb, the more likely it is to awaken the slumbering memories, causing the hallucination."
Amandina tersely acknowledged his hypothesis of her being special and proceeded with confidence.
After two minutes, Lumian suddenly raised his right hand and pressed it down. He lowered his voice and said, "Hide nearby."
He had heard soft footsteps.
Camus immediately rolled to the side and hid behind a palm tree.
Rhea crawled to another tree and concealed herself among the leaves.
Lugano glanced at the forest, where countless poisonous insects and snakes lurked. He kept telling himself, "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid. I can heal myself if I'm bitten."
He quickly shrank behind a pile of huge, brightly colored mushrooms.
Amandina had experience hiding in such places. Back then, she had witnessed Twanaku heading to the black ancient tomb.
Using the cover of the night and relying on her spiritual perception, she nimbly weaved through the low green plants and hid behind a huge tree in the distance.
Suddenly, a thick vine hanging from the tree came to life and swung towards Amandina, opening its blood-stained mouth.
It was a dark-green python!
Amandina's eyes snapped shut, and she clenched her fists.
The python fell into a deep slumber, reverberating weakly. It swayed a few times before finally landing on the ground.
Seeing that his teammates had hidden themselves, Lumian's body suddenly vanished, blending into the shadows brought about by the night.
After ten to twenty seconds, a figure traversed the path ahead.
High above, through the gaps in the leaves, Rhea spotted the figure clad in an intricate black robe with obvious layers. A fluffy black hat rested on his hair, and a gently swaying white feather protruded from the edge.
Lumian, in his shadow creature form, also saw the rough appearance of the figure.
His mind suddenly tensed as confusion welled up within him.
Isn't that Iveljsta Eggers?

Why would this temperance faction member of the Church of The Fool appear in a dream and become a participant in the Dream Festival?

Over the past few days, Lumian had explored the interior of Tizamo, the surrounding plantations, and the military camps outside of town. He clearly knew which outsiders had recently arrived, and Iveljsta was not among them!

Did he arrive here after the Dream Festival began?

Yes, he once mentioned that his original mission was to investigate something in the primitive forest around Port Pylos. Then, he received a last-minute order to deal with Hisoka's contact... Could the matter he's investigating be related to the black ancient tomb? The temperance faction belongs to the Prisoner pathway, and the Eggers family is descended from Death. It's normal for the black ancient tomb and the cold corpse inside to attract the temperance faction's Eggers...

Did Iveljsta Eggers encounter the Dream Festival while searching for the primitive tribe in the forest?

As Lumian analyzed Iveljsta's appearance, he scrutinized his expression through the shadows.

He saw an indescribable ferocity on the temperance faction member's pale white face. His dark brown eyes emitted a ferocity reminiscent of a wild beast, tinged with blood under the dim crimson moon's glow.

Although he's not affected by the dream projection formed by extreme emotions and desires, it's still difficult to control oneself and be restrained during the Dream Festival... Lumian wasn't surprised.

Ludwig and Kolobo were examples.

Considering Iveljsta's current state, Lumian didn't emerge from the shadows. He patiently waited for him to leave the area as the footsteps gradually receded.

From the looks of it, he's also headed for the black ancient tomb... Lumian transformed back into a human and stood on a path overgrown with weeds, gazing at the spot where Iveljsta's back had disappeared.

He raised his right hand and snapped his fingers.

"You can come out now."

Camus, Rhea, and Lugano left their hiding spots one after another. Camus even went to wake Amandina.

Amandina looked at Lumian and asked, "Do we continue?"

Lumian replied without hesitation, "Yes."

This time, they proceeded cautiously, paying close attention to their surroundings.

After another three to four minutes, Lumian, having prepared to deal with Iveljsta and Reaza, followed Amandina's guidance and slipped through a gap between a few giant trees.
A black, colossal, and familiar boulder came into view.
At a glance, it looked like a house-sized boulder, but upon closer inspection, one could see patterns on it. There were abnormal protrusions and depressions, and thread-like cracks that ordinary eyes couldn't detect.
It was indeed not just a stone.
Around the black boulder, tree roots emerged from the ground, covering an area the size of a square, resembling the protruding blood vessels of every human. However, they had been dead for a long time and were withered.
At that moment, the place was empty, devoid of anyone.
Iveljsta didn't come here? Isn't Reaza's destination here? Did they get lost midway? Or could it be that only those who have received the boon of an ancient tomb or a corpse can truly reach this area?
Lumian surveyed his surroundings in confusion.
Amandina's brows furrowed once more, and she couldn't help but press her hands against the sides of her head.
She said with a hint of pain, "Th-the hallucinations have become clearer. I-I see more.
"The figure approached me, extended his hand, and pressed it against the top of my head!
"He... He's wearing a strange hat..."
Camus, Rhea, and the others didn't interrupt Amandina to see if she could recall more or awaken more dormant memories.
Amandina muttered to herself, "Was this how I was given superpowers?"
As Lumian listened to Amandina's words, he fixed his gaze on the black boulder that was said to be an ancient tomb.
He felt a sense of familiarity.
As a Conspirer, Lumian quickly jogged his memories for the source of the familiarity.
Soon, he had an answer.
The black ancient tomb reminded him of the Samaritan Women's Spring when it wasn't pale white!
It's indeed closely related to the Death domain... Lumian examined the Blood Emperor's remnant aura in his right hand and confirmed that it wasn't affected or showing signs of activation.
At that moment, the surroundings fell into an abnormal silence.
The rustling in the forest, the cries of wild beasts, and the gunshots and screams from Tizamo seemed to have vanished. The deep night fell into complete silence.

Amandina looked up and shouted in horror, "I remember now. I remember now. When I obtained superpowers, this place was also this quiet. It didn't seem like the Dream Festival at all!"
In the next moment, Amandina's pupils dilated.
"He... He... That figure... That figure has appeared!"
Huh? Rhea, Camus, and Lugano looked at the black ancient tomb solemnly and blankly. They didn't see anyone or anything unusual.
Amandina's voice turned shrill.
"Can't you see? He... He's walking towards me... He's walking towards me!"
For a moment, Lumian and company couldn't determine if Amandina's illusion was so vivid that it was almost real, or if something had indeed happened.
"No! Don't come any closer!" Amandina shouted, her expression breaking down as she gazed at the empty area ahead.
With this shout, Lumian felt the entire area tremble slightly, and his surroundings blurred.
In the blurriness, scenes appeared, like different fragments of a dream.
These scenes centered on the black ancient tomb, but different people stood beside it.
In some scenes, Reaza stood in a thin black suit. In others, Iveljsta stood in a feathered hat. A man and a woman approached side by side, while others surrounded black-
robed humans.
One of the black-robed humans turned to Lumian with a smile.
His skin was light brown, and his flaxen eyes were tinged with dark green. He was none other than "Hisoka" Twanaku.

Chapter 687: Gaining Immortality

Lumian raised his eyebrows and returned Hisoka's gaze with a radiant smile.

The two individuals in different scenes exchanged glances through the blurry void, each casting their eyes in opposite directions.

Reaza, Iveljsta, and the man and woman who had just arrived in Tizamo had clearly seen the people in the other scene. They were astonished and dumbfounded by this incomprehensible, bizarre situation, but they couldn't interact with each other.

The gravekeepers in the same scene as Hisoka appeared to be praying, oblivious to the changes in their surroundings or treating them as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Lumian surveyed the area and vaguely comprehended the situation.

Regardless of how real this place seems, various encounters will mirror reality to different degrees. At its core, it remains a dream. And under the influence of the black ancient tomb or the cold corpse within, this area has fragmented into multiple dream shards. Each time a new group arrives, a fresh fragment is generated...

If not for Amandina's or my arrival triggering some abnormality, it would be impossible for people in different scenes to interact. They wouldn't be able to attack each other, nor could they see, hear, or detect one another's presence.

This must be why the gravekeepers vanish every time the Dream Festival commences.

They don't disappear. They're simply in different dream fragments from the Dream Festival participants.

Based on the results of the previous spirit channeling, is this some kind of concealment?

But the black ancient tomb hasn't been unsealed yet...

As Lumian's thoughts raced, Amandina's voice grew increasingly shrill, filled with terror.

"He's right in front of me! Save me! Save me!"

Lumian stared at Amandina, who was retreating in an attempt to evade the invisible creature, but he couldn't perceive the figure she described.

In the brief span of more than ten seconds since Amandina's panic attack, Lumian had used his Spirit Vision, Weakness Investigation, Luck Observation, and other abilities, but he hadn't detected anything unusual.

He was on the verge of taking out the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth.

Lumian reached into his Traveler's Bag. Without a rough grasp of the situation, he didn't know how to rescue Amandina, who had broken down from fright.
Just as his fingers brushed against the Mystery Prying Glasses, Amandina was suddenly taken aback.
After a moment, she turned to Lumian and said in bewilderment, "He—he turned and left. He seems to have recognized me..."
"Recognized you?" Lumian felt compelled to confirm Amandina's mental state.
Amandina replied in confusion, "Yes, he nodded at me and left."
Is this why, after the Dream Festival begins, anyone who wishes to approach the black ancient tomb must be guided by someone who has received the boon of the ancient tomb or the corpse? Robert and Padre Cali likely played the same role in similar scenes, but they don't belong to the Evernight pathway and lack dream-related abilities, so they didn't notice... Did the people in the other dream fragments also receive the boon of the black ancient tomb or the cold corpse? Lumian's heart stirred as he asked Amandina, "Where did he go? Where did that figure go?"
Amandina's gaze shifted to the periphery of her surroundings.
Her eyes widened with lingering fear and excitement. She raised her palm and pointed at the dream fragment where the man and woman were.
"He went there.
"He's gone through! He's gone through!"
Amandina's explanation made Lumian and the others feel the black ancient tomb solidifying and becoming heavier. The entire area shook even more violently.
Simultaneously, Lumian sensed a familiar burning sensation on his left chest, but he didn't hear any ravings that seemed to come from an infinite distance.
In a daze, he saw a huge aqua-colored vortex, a dim village shrouded in gray fog, and figures within the village.
Shepherd Pierre Berry, who believed in Inevitability, and Lumian's friend, Azéma Lizier, raised their pale-white arms, as if silently shouting.
Lumian also spotted his semi-subterranean two-story house and Aurore, sitting quietly on the orange roof with her arms crossed.
Lumian no longer resisted the illusion.
He roughly understood what was happening.
As the figure entered other dream fragments, the black ancient tomb's abnormality intensified. It contained the power of the Death domain, "awakening" the Cordu villagers within the seal.
These villagers were already deceased, with only soul fragments

remaining. Naturally, they would be affected by the power of the Death domain.
This realization made Lumian feel pain, sorrow, and bitterness that he hadn't experienced in a long time.
He "watched" Aurore, clad in a light-blue dress with thick, long blond hair and light-blue eyes. She didn't attempt to resist the invisible power of death.
"He walked to that woman," Amandina continued dutifully.
That woman? Camus, Rhea, and Lugano turned their attention to the corresponding dream fragment.
Having just arrived in Tizamo that night, the lady in the light-colored dress didn't hear Amandina's words. She only knew that the patrol team was looking at her.
Her spirituality gave her a sense of foreboding. She hurriedly turned to her companion and asked, "Devajo, do you sense any malice?"
The man named Devajo, dressed in a dark gray suit, slowly shook his head and said, "Nothing."
In the dream fragment where Lumian and the others were, Amandina explained in high spirits, "He... The figure... extended his hand! He pressed his hand... on that woman's head!"
Just as Amandina finished speaking, Devajo saw his companion, the lady in the light-colored dress, suddenly collapse to her knees. Her expression was stiff, and her face was abnormally pale-white.
Ooo!
In all the dream fragments, an ice-cold wind howled.
Lumian "saw" Aurore standing up on the orange roof, her expression dazed as she gazed into the sky, as if sensing something.
She opened her mouth and spoke almost instinctively.
Lumian didn't know the corresponding language, but he had heard something similar before.
It was the language used by Armored Shadow Chen Tu, a language that Franca occasionally uttered a word or two of!
Although he couldn't understand, Lumian vaguely grasped what his sister was talking about, perhaps due to the connection between them at the soul level.
She muttered to herself, "An immortal blessed my crown, bestowing upon me the gift of eternal life.
In the dream fragment where Devajo was, the light-colored lady's hat, which had unconsciously fallen to her knees, suddenly flew off.
On her neck, the backs of her hands, and the surface of her face, pores opened one by one, producing white feathers tainted with

faint yellow stains.
Devajo observed this scene with a solemn expression. He didn't attempt to interrupt his companion's abnormality and instead took a few cautious steps back.
He couldn't comprehend what was happening. Although he hadn't sensed any malice directed at him, he prudently distanced himself from the anomaly.
The lady in the light-colored dress's azure eyes had lost focus, appearing abnormally vacant and lifeless.
In the blink of an eye, the white feathers, tainted with light-yellow oil stains, seemed to possess a consciousness and life of their own. They frantically emerged from the gaps in the fabric of the dress.
Within moments, the lady in the light-colored dress was enveloped by white feathers tainted with light-yellow oil stains.
Her body grew light and gradually floated, becoming increasingly illusory.
Her azure eyes fixed on Devajo as she shouted in a hollow and agitated voice, "I've become a god! I've achieved immortality!"
The white-feathered monster hovered above the black ancient tomb, incessantly shouting, "I've become a god! I've achieved immortality!"
In another dream fragment, Lumian heard Aurore change her words.
With a fearful expression, she whispered, "Immortal Ascension..."
In the next instant, the ethereal monster, covered in white feathers, flew towards the black ancient tomb in the dream fragment.
She passed through the stone wall on the tomb's surface and vanished.
Suddenly, the frigid wind ceased, freezing.
The black ancient tomb shook visibly, and the tomb door, outlined by hair-like cracks, emitted the sound of dull rubbing, as if someone was trying to push it open from within.
Aurore, "in front" of Lumian and the "surrounding" Cordu began to fade, as if erased by an eraser.
Lumian glanced at the slowly opening tomb door and turned to "Hisoka" Twanaku, who was in another dream fragment.
The dream projection wasn't surprised by the abnormality, nor did he show any fear. Instead, the silent gravekeepers around him rose to their feet.
Amidst the illusory sound of water, the tomb door of the black ancient tomb opened completely.
Accompanied by this change, all the dream fragments that

appeared in the blur seemed to be pulled by an invisible force, fusing together.
Devajo, Reaza, Iveljsta, Hisoka Twanaku, and the gravekeepers materialized in front of the black ancient tomb, near Lumian and the others.
"Hisoka" Twanaku smiled, as if he had anticipated that one of the outsiders would transform into a "god" and that the ancient tomb's door would open at this very moment.
He retrieved a golden mask from his black robe.
The mask appeared to be crafted from pure gold, its eyes and face smeared with white and black paint, giving it an unsettling appearance.
Twanaku donned the golden mask and, unlike the other gravekeepers, didn't retreat. Instead, he sprinted towards the black ancient tomb and the open tomb door.
Thud! Thud! Thud!
Lumian heard a distinct heartbeat.
It emanated from within the black ancient tomb.

Chapter 688: Preparations

As Lumian heard his heartbeat, a palm reached out from the open door of the black ancient tomb.

The palm showed no signs of decay or yellow bandages. Its surface was covered in gold, shimmering with a mystical hue under the dim crimson moonlight.

Upon seeing the golden palm, Lumian felt an invisible force compress his soul, instantly severing its connection to his body.

Immediately after, he realized his body had transformed into a cold, solid wall, preventing his spirit from spreading or being controlled by his consciousness.

At that moment, Lumian's soul felt trapped in a cage, unable to escape. He could only see limited scenes through his eyes and hear relatively loud voices with his ears.

Everyone present turned into statues, frozen in place.

Faced with this situation, Lumian suddenly recalled a saying: The body is a cage for the heart, and the world is a cage for the body.

In the stillness, the only person still moving was "Hisoka" Twanaku.

The golden mask on his face emitted a hazy glow as he swiftly approached the black ancient tomb and the golden palm extending from it.

Although Lumian couldn't move or use his abilities, his soul was merely "imprisoned"—it didn't affect his thoughts.

Seeing that "Hisoka" Twanaku was almost unaffected by the golden palm, Lumian quickly deduced several things.

There's a high likelihood the gold Hisoka seized from Devise—the gold mine city—was used on the cold corpse in the black ancient tomb.

The item he obtained from the Nois family's Demon is likely the golden mask he now wears.

The former was an attempt to revive the cold corpse. It's equivalent to Franca's mention of creating a complete body. The latter ensures Hisoka can approach the target unaffected after the cold corpse's "resurrection" and achieve a certain goal.

Did Hisoka once plan to use this to control the cold corpse and attain demigod-level strength?

When I killed him in the real world, did the him in the dream attempt to "resurrect" through this?

Yes, Hisoka's Wraith power comes from the same source as the cold corpse. Perhaps there's a way to make the corpse believe he's its original spirit and accept his lead...

Based on the information I've gathered and what just transpired,

humans who have received the boon of the black ancient tomb and the cold corpse can open the tomb without waking the corpse. To awaken it, an intruder must be bestowed with immortality by an invisible figure, ascend to godhood, and enter the ancient tomb. And intruders will only be attacked by invisible figures without the Dream Festival's bestowed guides...

It's best for an intruder to remain lucid?

How did Hisoka know outsiders would participate in the Dream Festival this year and arrive at the black ancient tomb?

He didn't have such a plan to begin with? That's because he didn't know he was going to die. If he can't complete his plan during this year's Dream Festival, the dream projection will completely dissipate in the next few months, causing him to lose his last hope of revival...

The involvement of outsiders was a pleasant surprise for him?

No, it's too much of a coincidence. Reaza's rushing over can be explained by his discovery of me investigating the Dream Festival and his worry that he wouldn't have a chance to obtain what he wants after this year. But why did Iveljsta coincidentally come to this primitive forest to investigate something? Why did two Beyonders who can remain lucid in the special dream arrive just before the Dream Festival began?

Moreover, why did the Rose School of Thought send someone to Matani in the last few months of the year to gather detailed day-to-day information?

"Hisoka" Twanaku originally planned to complete his plan during this year's Dream Festival. He deliberately leaked some information and clues to attract different factions of interest.

The information these factions received wasn't detailed enough. They had no choice but to dispatch personnel in advance to conduct the corresponding investigations or bribe members of Matani's patrol teams...

This may very well be the truth, a truth that doesn't rely on coincidence. The only thing Hisoka didn't anticipate was his demise before the Dream Festival began.

Now, the Dream Festival is his last and only hope for resurrection.

If he fails to achieve his plan, he will die completely after today!

No wonder he's so secretive about Tizamo despite being honest about everything else in the dream...

Hisoka is truly a cunning Devil skilled at manipulating people's hearts. If he hadn't been bent on killing me and his identity had given him a good opportunity to choose to stay in Port Pylos, he wouldn't have been easy to kill. Yes, if I had played by the book and lacked the goodwill of a high-ranking entity, I might have died at

his hands.
The Demon of the Nois family also has designs on the cold corpse in the black tomb and wants to use the Dream Festival. Therefore, when Hisoka mentioned the Dream Festival in his dream, he was immediately attacked by the shadow...
Among those present, who is the Demon's minion?
Or could it be that the Demon from the Nois family hasn't arrived yet and wants to wait until the end, when the situation is clear, before taking action and completing the harvest?
If it's just a dream projection, without the main body's cooperation, there should be a huge loophole in Hisoka's plan. *Where is the loophole?*
Trapped in his body, Lumian couldn't stop Hisoka. He watched helplessly as Hisoka ran to the open door of the black ancient tomb.
Wait...
Since the black ancient tomb reminds me of the Samaritan Women's Spring, I can try that method...
Lumian acted without hesitation, focusing his attention on his Spirit Body's right hand.
Alista Tudor's remnant aura didn't just permeate his body!
And the Blood Emperor was closely linked to the Samaritan Women's Spring!
Wearing a golden mask, Hisoka's body began to etherealize uncontrollably. Just as he was about to grasp the hand of the corpse protruding from the black ancient tomb, he suddenly sensed an extremely terrifying, frenzied, and violent aura appearing behind him. It soared into the sky explosively, sweeping through the surroundings.
The crimson moon's glow dimmed, and "Hisoka" Twanaku's body instinctively stiffened, trembling violently.
Splash!
An illusory sound of water echoed from the black ancient tomb, and the golden palm seemed to be dragged back into the tomb by some unknown force.
The feeling of their souls being imprisoned within their bodies dissipated. Lumian hurriedly halted the dissipation of the Blood Emperor's aura.
Although Amandina, Camus, Devajo, and the others instinctively felt fear, the confinement of their spirits and fixed line of sight prevented them from discovering the source of the aura that conquered everything.
Ignoring the search for the origin of the terrifying aura, the fierce-eyed Iveljsta followed his instinctive desire and retrieved an item

from his hidden pocket.
It was a palm-sized rag doll, dressed in a black Gothic dress entwined with eerie vines. It had long golden hair and blood-red eyes.
The doll was sinister. Just the sight of it made Lumian's flesh crawl beneath his skin.
Thud! Thud! Thud!
The heartbeat in the black ancient tomb intensified, becoming resounding.
Beside the tomb door, "Hisoka" Twanaku felt a chill run down his spine, as if targeted by an evil being.
Instinctively, he recalled something.
Years ago, gravekeepers had found a half-withered evil heart near the black ancient tomb.
The gravekeepers believed that the ancient corpse in the tomb had been lost due to some mutation. After all, the characteristics of its power were the same, and the levels seemed similar. Therefore, they placed the heart back into the tomb.
Just a moment ago, the long-dead heart had begun to beat, but now it beat stronger and faster!
Not far from Iveljsta, Reaza also made a move.
He produced a mask.
The mask, also made of gold, bore a striking resemblance to the one worn by Hisoka. Varying shades of white and black paint adorned the eyes and face!
The difference between the two golden masks was that the one in Reaza's hand was darker, as if touched by death.
Then, Reaza produced a human skull carved from crystal.
He placed the dark golden mask on the crystal skull's face.
A frigid wind gusted, engulfing the crystal skull in a massive vortex. The crystal skull, adorned with the golden mask, levitated, as if it had grown an invisible body made of wind.
An intense coldness spread in all directions, condensing a layer of frost on the ground.
The man named Devajo reached behind his head and grasped something in his hair.
With a sudden tug, he ripped off his skin, along with his dark gray suit.
Devajo took on a different appearance. He had black hair, brown eyes, a cold expression, and high cheekbones. He was in his thirties or forties, dressed in a white shirt and black pants.
He flipped the human skin in his hand, revealing dense, dizzying blood embroidery beneath.
Devajo opened his mouth and spat out mouthfuls of blood,

emitting a strong sulfuric smell.
The blood protruded from the human skin, forming a green-eyed man in a dark gray suit.
With a playful smile, the "man" approached the black ancient tomb.
Lumian quickly scanned the area, his eyelids twitching three times.
He couldn't help but criticize, Do you all possess godhood-level powers that you can utilize? Although they all seem to be one-time use... Are you bullying me for not having any?
Despite Lumian's criticism, he quickly recited an honorific name in ancient Hermes.
It was Madam Magician's honorific name.
However, it failed to penetrate this special and hidden dream.
Lumian wasn't dejected. His goal wasn't the black ancient tomb, nor was it the cold corpse or its beating heart.
Now that he knew the whereabouts of Hisoka's gold, there was only one thing he wanted to do.
Eliminate Hisoka's dream projection, take away the golden mask, and let him perish completely!

Chapter 689: Precision

Although Lumian's target was clear, he didn't immediately attack Hisoka's dream projection. This was because his opponent was still beside the black ancient tomb, and under the gaze of three items with godhood power, Lumian might be targeted by all of them if he teleported over.

The three items hadn't reached the point where Lumian couldn't be under their gaze simultaneously, and they appeared to last only a few minutes. However, they displayed certain humanoid characteristics, as if they possessed the ability to think and make decisions on their own. If targeted by them, it would be no different from facing weakened Sequence 4 demigods.

Under such circumstances, Lumian naturally wouldn't take the initiative to enter the eye of the storm and help "Hisoka" Twanaku share the burden. He even felt that if his rival was killed by an outsider whom he had personally attracted, it would be cause for celebration. It was inevitable—after all, since he had already killed Hisoka once, he wasn't obsessed with obliterating the other party's resurrection. Having someone else "do it" for him could reduce his spirituality expenditure.

As Lumian gazed at the open tomb door, he retreated a few steps to the edge of the area. He quickly said to Amandina, Camus, Rhea, and Lugano, "Retreat to the edge!"

Upon hearing this order, Lugano's face lit up with happiness. He was the first to turn around and sprint away.

Rhea raised her hunting bow, aiming left and right, taking slow steps back to guard against any attacks. Camus's performance was similar to hers, but he held his custom revolver.

Amandina glanced at the sinister rag doll, the crystal skull adorned with a golden mask, and the green-eyed man with bulging human skin. She felt lightheaded, as if she was too exhausted to control her body.

She instantly realized that these were things she shouldn't come into contact with. What transpired beside the black tomb was beyond her ability to interfere.

She swiftly turned her back to the ancient black tomb and prepared to follow Lugano to the edge of the area.

At that moment, Lumian, wearing a grayish-white lightning-shaped brooch, glanced at the gravekeepers who were also hurriedly retreating and thoughtfully asked Amandina, "Where's that figure?"

Amandina ran nimbly, synchronizing her movements with her breathing as she replied, "I don't know! He's gone!"

As soon as she finished speaking, the illusory water reverberating in the black tomb ceased.
The palm-sized evil rag doll in the Gothic dress suddenly floated up, escaping Iveljsta's grasp.
It hovered in midair, with "Hisoka" Twanaku's figure reflected in its blood-red eyes.
Twanaku, who was about to reach into the ancient black tomb, suddenly felt the golden mask on his face come to life. It first pressed inward, as if it wanted to crush his skull, then pulled outward, as if trying to escape.
Hisoka instinctively raised his right hand to press the golden mask back, only to realize that his sleeve had tightly wrapped around his arm, immobilizing it, almost like it was tied up.
Remembering the fate of a godhoodless individual losing the golden mask at the tomb's entrance, Twanaku didn't hesitate. His body became completely ethereal as he transformed into a Wraith.
Then, he vanished from in front of the black tomb and reappeared in the pupil of one of the gravekeepers who had removed their golden mask.
Due to the untimely demise of Hisoka's physical body and his inability to get "assistance," Hisoka had no choice but to modify his plan and wait for the three factions vying for the cold corpse in the ancient black tomb to begin fighting.
When the chaos reached its peak and the corresponding items were nearly depleted, he would re-enter the fray and compete for the corpse.
As Hisoka temporarily retreated, the area in front of the ancient black tomb became vacant.
Just as the palm-sized evil rag doll was about to float over, the crystal skull, adorned with a golden mask, flew diagonally, enveloped by a vortex-shaped body formed by the cold wind.
Pale-white flames ignited in its eyes, with a hint of darkness at the center.
In response, illusory black water seeped out of the black tomb's walls, forming a silent river that blocked the entrance.
The river was clearly similar to a stream, but it gave Iveljsta, Devajo, Reaza, and the others a vast and expansive feeling.
Their bodies gradually turned cold, and their lives drained faster, irreversibly.
The evil rag doll, clad in a black Gothic dress, hovered in midair, not attempting to cross the silent river.
The crystal skull, adorned with a golden mask, descended into the river.
The wind vortex that constituted its colossal body howled and

expanded, as if transforming into an invisible ferry that floated steadily on the surface of the silent river.
The crystal skull, adorned with a golden mask, steered the ferry against the current, slowly approaching the open door of the ancient black tomb.
The green-eyed man, dressed in a dark gray formal suit made of human skin and blood, stood at the back, observing the scene.
With a smile, he opened and closed his mouth, as if silently muttering to himself.
Almost simultaneously, the crystal skull on the invisible ferry emitted a cracking sound.
The pale-white flames in its eye sockets flickered violently, and tiny patterns appeared on its crystalline surface, causing invisible dust to fall.
The ferry itself alternated between expansion and contraction, becoming extremely unstable as it slowed down on the River of Death.
Lumian paid no attention to the battle unfolding in front of the ancient black tomb. With a single glance, his body ignited with intense white flames.
Swoosh!
He transformed into a flaming spear and crossed a distance of 20 to 30 meters, aiming at the gravekeeper whose body had been possessed by "Hisoka" Twanaku.
Hisoka raised his head, revealing a face with light-brown skin and wild beauty.
Rhea!
The gravekeeper whose body had been possessed by Hisoka was Rhea's dream projection!
Facing the rapidly expanding reflection, transforming from a speck of white light into a blazing white flaming spear with a burning tip, Hisoka didn't dodge. He assumed a stance allowing Lumian to attack.
The blazing-white flame spear was incredibly fast. He didn't have time to raise his hunting bow, aim, or shoot. He only slightly bent his arm.
He felt a searing pain, as if his body and soul were about to be pierced.
Hisoka showed no fear. Instead, he chuckled.
The blazing-white flaming spear passed over his shoulder and landed behind him, failing to strike him.
The flames dissipated, revealing Lumian.
The Hisoka in Rhea's dream projection's eyes vanished.
Rhea's dream projection spun around, her expression cold and

filled with hatred. She raised her hunting bow, aimed at Lumian, and drew the bowstring.
She was a dream projection formed by excessive desires and emotions, unable to control herself.
"Hmph!"
Two beams of white light shot out from Lumian's nose. Before Rhea's dream projection could release an arrow wrapped in lightning, her eyes closed, and she fainted, collapsing to the ground.
Rhea, who had just arrived at the periphery, trembled.
Her eyes reflected the black-robed "Hisoka" Twanaku.
The strength of their souls differed significantly, and Hisoka easily possessed and seized control of Rhea's body.
Taking advantage of the fact that Camus, Amandina, and Lugano hadn't noticed Rhea's abnormality, he changed the direction of his bow and aimed it at Camus.
Sizzle, sizzle, sizzle. The arrowhead became engulfed in bright lightning.
As soon as Rhea aimed her bow and arrow at Camus, he sensed her incongruent state and noticed her abnormal behavior.
As a member of the patrol team with considerable combat experience, Camus looked at Rhea without hesitation, his eyes flashing with blinding lightning.
Simultaneously, Hisoka, who had anticipated this, detached from Rhea's body and leaped into Amandina's beautiful azure eyes.
Two blinding lightning bolts shot out of Camus's eyes and drilled into Rhea's head.
Rhea's eyes bulged, and her mouth gaped open. She leaned back, as if she had suffered a heavy blow, but she couldn't make a sound of pain.
Psychic Piercing!
Camus's Psychic Piercing struck her before her arrow could leave the bowstring, causing her to feel pain from the depths of her soul. Her mind went blank as she stood rooted to the ground.
Poof. The arrow, engulfed in bright lightning, shot out unsteadily, missing Camus and flying a short distance away.
Amandina, with "Hisoka" Twanaku's figure reflected in her azure eyes, felt a chill run down her spine. A dense coldness enveloped her, freezing her soul and rendering her unable to control her limbs.
Behind her, Lumian's figure swiftly materialized.
"Ha!"
Lumian opened his mouth and decisively spat out a faint yellow blob of light.

However, Hisoka had no intention of stopping. He shifted his position with another Mirror Jump.
Thud!
Amandina collapsed to the ground, unconscious.
Compared to Padre Cali, Hisoka clearly excelled in combat, possessing a wealth of experience and outstanding talent.
This time, Hisoka appeared on a water droplet on the surface of a leaf more than ten meters away. He leaped out and looked at Lumian and the others with a smile.
He wanted to use Wraith Shriek to attack Lumian Lee and his companions in a wide range, rendering some of them unable to fight and temporarily immobilizing the rest.
Upon realizing this, Lumian chose not to teleport outside Wraith Shriek's range. Instead, he withdrew his palms.
A blazing white fireball condensed, the size of the black tomb.
"Ah!"
Amidst a piercing howl of pain, the colossal white-hot fireball flew out.
With a smile, Hisoka vanished from the tree and leaped into Camus's pupils, where blood flowed from his eyes, nostrils, and ears.
At that moment, the colossal blazing white fireball split into dozens of smaller ones.
Accompanying this transformation, the grayish-white Fury of the Sea brooch on Lumian's chest erupted with bright, silver-
white, and innumerable bolts of lightning after he was struck by Wraith Shriek.
The lightning coiled around the incandescent white fireballs and split into dozens, enveloping the area.
Rumble!
Amidst the consecutive explosions, Rhea, Lugano, Amandina, and Camus were sent flying by the wind and waves. They suffered burns and were struck by a net of lightning.
Camus's entire body went numb, and his gaze lost focus. Hisoka, who was attached to him, also suffered an electric shock. Due to his Wraith state, he was severely injured and couldn't undergo a new round of Mirror Jumps.
Lumian recovered from the Wraith Shriek's assault. He looked at Hisoka, who had emerged from Camus's body, and his lips curled up.
He was using Precision.
The goal was to attack every target indiscriminately and ensure the damage was acceptable.
And when he launched an attack, he didn't need to consciously

control it. The Fury of the Sea would automatically add an electric shock to all his offensive fireballs!

Chapter 690: Death's Symphony

Lumian endured the pain in his soul and eardrums as he activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

His figure abruptly vanished, swiftly materializing beside Camus and Hisoka.

As the residual silver-white electric currents surged into the ground, Hisoka, in Wraith form, was about to escape the paralysis's effects. Lumian activated the black mark on his right chest.

This corresponded to the Spell of Harrumph.

Just as he was about to harrumph, a sudden premonition of danger struck him. He abruptly turned around and stepped back.

A spear condensed from the light of dawn hurtled from afar, spanning a distance of 30 to 40 meters. It flew past Lumian and plunged into the soil behind him, leaving a deep hole as thick as an arm.

Lumian saw his attacker--one of the gravekeepers on the verge of escaping to the periphery.

He was tall, and even in his black robe, his robust strength was evident. A broadsword of light had already condensed in his hand.

A Dawn Paladin? A gravekeeper who received a boon from the Warrior pathway from the black ancient tomb? Lumian wasn't surprised at all. Instead, it only confirmed his suspicions.

What made his scalp tingle was that the other gravekeepers had also turned to face him.

The dozen or so bestowed locked their gazes onto Lumian.

Hisoka had already broken free from the paralysis caused by the electric shock. Worried about the Spell of Harrumph's control, he endured the pain and leaped into the eyes of one of the gravekeepers. Then, he broke free and transformed back into a human.

He looked at Lumian, who was dozens of meters away, and his smile widened.

I'm also a gravekeeper now. Harming me means harming the gravekeepers!

Although they won't actively assist me and will try to escape once the tomb is opened using the current method, they will undoubtedly react if you threaten me.

This is one of the reasons I dared to "invite" outsiders to the Dream Festival and guide them here.

Unfortunately, my main body is dead, and I can't obtain the promised godhood item from the Celestial Worthy and Loki to resist the outsiders' high-level powers. For now, I can only wait

patiently.
According to the original plan, if something went wrong, I could choose to abandon the corpse in the tomb and help the Nois family's Demon obtain it to aid the Rose School of Thought in exchange for other rewards. Now, I must obtain the corpse and become its "spirit."
Only then can I survive after the Dream Festival and maintain my consciousness and rationality as a demigod-level undead creature.
However, these matters don't concern you, Lumian. You have to face a Guardian and multiple Spirit Warlocks, Gatekeepers, Soul Assurers, Spirit Guides, and Dawn Paladins...
No one below Sequence 4 can withstand the assault of such a Beyonder "army!"
Lumian watched as the gravekeepers' gazes fell upon him. Some of them even condensed broadswords of light. As they charged forward, Lumian tensed up. He reached out, grabbed Camus's shoulder, and teleported away from his current position.
Not long after they vanished, the ground silently collapsed, and pale-white palms extended outward.
Lumian appeared beside the severely injured Rhea with Camus and grabbed her shoulder with his other hand.
Then, the trio swiftly vanished, reappearing beside Amandina, who had awakened from the electric shock.
The distance between them and the gravekeepers widened to nearly a hundred meters.
Lumian clamped his feet around Amandina's arm, releasing the accumulated spirituality and strength in his body.
His condition returned to normal, and he activated the black mark on his right shoulder once more.
This time, the four of them teleported to Lugano, who was self-healing.
As Lumian continued to flash, some of the gravekeepers' Beyonder powers failed to hit them. The remaining ones were forced to change directions repeatedly, preventing them from closing the distance.
Just as Lugano was about to tell his employer, "Let's escape quickly. Teleport us back to Tizamo," he saw Lumian toss Camus and Rhea towards him.
Thud!
The three of them collapsed together, followed by Amandina.
"Ha!"
Lumian spat out a pale-yellow light, enveloping the four of them.
Lugano, Amandina, and the others lost consciousness. With their souls' strength, it would take them at least a minute to regain

consciousness without external stimulation.
With this done, Lumian teleported away once more, preventing himself from being targeted by the gravekeepers whose abilities were effective at this distance.
His body vanished, and the gravekeepers, including Hisoka, lost sight of him.
Lumian silently materialized behind the gravekeepers, appearing in front of a palm tree.
Leaning against the rough trees, he retrieved an item from his Traveler's Bag.
It was a blackened bone flute with blood-colored holes.
Symphony of Hatred!
Lumian's lips curled up as he brought the sinister bone flute to his lips with a smile.
Almost simultaneously, "Hisoka" Twanaku felt a strong premonition of danger. He abruptly turned around, spotted Lumian, and locked onto him. He activated his Devil form, transforming into a pitch-black monster nearly three meters tall with curved goat horns and bat-like wings.
Hisoka instinctively abandoned his Wraith form, forsaking the plan of possessing Lumian Lee and restraining him. He found it impossible to remain calm under the aura capable of conquering everything and reflexively fled from the other party.
Accompanied by Hisoka's movements, the gravekeepers also turned.
Lumian's lips touched the black bone flute, emitting a bloody scent, and he played the first note.
The smile on his face widened.
In the real world, facing such a large group of Sequence 7, 6, and 5 Beyonders, he could only teleport Lugano and the others back to Tizamo. However, this was the Dream Festival. Apart from the few who had recently arrived and could remain lucid, the others were either fused with their dream projections or allowed the corresponding dream projections to move independently.
Dream projections were formed from excessive desires and emotions, and they would lose control during the Dream Festival.
Realizing that Hisoka's dream projection could also become a gravekeeper and maintain a certain level of lucidity and rationality, Lumian believed that it wasn't that the gravekeepers didn't have dream projections, but that they had fused with them. Using their uniqueness and their self-control in their lucid state, they barely suppressed them.
Such targets were the Symphony of Hatred's favorite prey.
It could inflict an attack on the weakness of an enemy's mind or

body who heard the corresponding melody. Those with unstable minds might experience symptoms akin to madness. Those with psychological issues might have latent problems triggered. There's even a chance that excessive desires could cause them to explode on the spot. Individuals with illnesses or old injuries would inevitably face severe consequences. Those less fortunate might find themselves trapped in extreme misfortune.

Faced with the dream projections—against the gravekeepers who might have fused with them, Lumian felt that the Symphony of Hatred could be miraculously effective, igniting 100% of the targets' excessive desires and emotions!

Therefore, he chose to make such an attempt. If it failed, he would teleport back to the unconscious Amandina and company, hold onto them, and return to Tizamo.

A melodious and sorrowful melody sounded, but "Hisoka" Twanaku, who was too late to stop Lumian, instinctively burned the two curved and mysterious goat horns on his head.

Mental Shock!

Lumian's emotions swelled, and the melody he played was filled with unmistakable pain and hatred.

He also saw many spirits, as well as the gravekeepers wielding broadswords of light, rushing towards him in various ways.

He continued playing the Symphony of Hatred.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Apart from the unconscious Rhea's dream projection, all the gravekeepers, including Hisoka, halted with contorted expressions.

They heard illusory explosions in their bodies and minds, and their eyes instantly turned bloodshot. They lost control of their bodies, and their ears were filled with buzzing sounds.

They couldn't see, hear, or think. Their bodies and souls had been severely injured.

The same went for "Hisoka" Twanaku. In essence, he remained a dream projection formed by extreme emotions and desires.

However, as he suffered the Symphony of Hatred's weakness attack, he also ignited Lumian's emotions and desires from the impact.

Lumian's mind buzzed, and blood vessels bulged in his green eyes. A viscous liquid reeking of blood flowed from his nose, and his internal organs seemed to suffer varying degrees of damage.

The Symphony of Hatred fell to the ground with a thud.

More than a hundred meters away from Lumian, near the forest, the unconscious Amandina, Lugano, and company's faces contorted, as if they were trapped in different nightmares.

Devajo, weakened by spitting out blood to the human skin, silently

approached the edge of the forest, ready to escape at any moment. However, he heard the Symphony of Hatred's melody.
He froze, vomiting copious amounts of bright red blood that reeked of sulfur. His entire being weakened, and he nearly lost control.
Iveljsta watched as the evil rag doll emitted a silent shriek, transforming the crystal skull with its golden mask and its invisible "ferry" into a pale-white goat. Just as he was about to approach the silent river in front of the black ancient tomb in delight, his pale-white face instantly flushed red, and dark-red blood flowed from the corners of his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears.
He had also suffered the explosion of emotions and desires, but he wasn't a dream projection, nor had he fused with one. Therefore, he was only severely injured, unlike the gravekeepers and Devajo, who were pushed to the brink of death.
Reaza, who had maintained his lucidity and rationality without a dream projection, panted heavily, as if caught in a struggle of his own. His cold eyes became rather lost.
In the area where the black tomb resided, only the evil rag doll, the human skin man, and the pale-white goat with the golden mask remained unaffected by the Symphony of Hatred.
Relying on his Ascetic endurance, Lumian quickly recovered from the severe damage caused by the explosion of desire and emotions. Gazing at Hisoka and the others, who had yet to recover, he smiled and extended his right palm.
A colossal white-hot fireball swiftly condensed, engulfed in silver-white lightning, and launched.
Upon reaching the gravekeepers' area, it split into nearly 20 smaller lightning fireballs that blasted at "Hisoka" Twanaku and the gravekeepers.
Precision!
Rumble!
Blazing white flames and silver-white lightning surged simultaneously. Lumian watched as the gravekeepers, already on the brink of death, collapsed like straw, their lives extinguished one after another.
This is what Culling means... Lumian closed his eyes and took it in.
Rumble!
Apart from the unconscious Rhea's dream projection and the Guardian struggling to hold on, the gravekeepers were all dead. Only "Hisoka" Twanaku, his body still emitting silver- white lightning, remained.
His eyes were bloodshot, on the verge of losing control.
At that moment, he saw a flaming spear wrapped in silver-

white lightning fly over and collide with the side of his nose.
Amidst a sizzling sound, the blazing white flaming spear pierced through his skull, igniting his brain and flying behind him, leaving behind raging silver-white electric snakes.
As the flames dissipated, Lumian's figure appeared, his back facing "Hisoka" Twanaku.
The Devil-form Hisoka's eyes glazed over. He swayed a few times before collapsing to the ground.
Weakness Investigation!
Cull!

Chapter 691: Pursuer

As the blazing white flames rapidly dissipated, Lumian turned his back on "Hisoka" Twanaku and fixed his gaze on the Guardian, who was swaying unsteadily more than ten meters away. With a chuckle, he declared, "Before, I needed my team's help to defeat you. But now, I can take you down alone."

His words were aimed squarely at Hisoka.

Collapsing to the ground, Hisoka's consciousness gradually faded as he caught Lumian's remark. He instinctively tried to clench his fists, but lacked the strength to do so.

A desperate gasp escaped his throat, his pupils dilating and losing focus.

Hisoka cursed himself for choosing Devil Transformation over Wraith Transformation when confronting Lumian Lee. If only he had opted for the latter, he could have disrupted Lumian's attempt to play the blackened bone flute with Wraith Shriek. Alas, he had no way of knowing the specifics, only able to sense the presence and source of a malicious intent. Given Lumian Lee's ability to infuse bullets, fireballs, and other attacks with electric shocks and target weaknesses with precision, Devil Transformation had seemed the more versatile choice, offering protection against various contingencies.

As for why he hadn't summoned a barrage of Sulfur Fireballs, even at the cost of mutual destruction—Hisoka sensed the considerable distance separating them. By the time he could conjure and launch ten to twenty fireballs, Lumian Lee would have already finished playing the flute. With teleportation at his disposal, Lumian could effortlessly evade the clustered assault. Moreover, spells like Language of Foulness had a limited range.

Left with no other recourse, "Hisoka" Twanaku could only resort to Emotional Shock and Desire Detonation, targeting Lumian Lee's weakness. He hoped that after both of them sustained grievous injuries, their recovery rates would be comparable, granting him an opportunity to mount a different response.

However, despite the pain, blood loss, and abnormal look in his eyes, Lumian Lee managed to maintain his balance. Fighting through the debilitating effects, he executed a precise area-of-effect bombardment enhanced with electric shocks. The effort inflicted fresh wounds upon himself and temporarily paralyzed him.

"Gasp..."

Hisoka Twanaku mustered his remaining strength to drag Lumian Lee down with him in a final, desperate gambit of losing control.

But his life force had reached its limit. Darkness engulfed his vision as his consciousness slipped into oblivion, a maelstrom of indignation, resentment, and agony consuming him.
The colossal Devil's body spasmed a few times before falling still.
Hisoka's last glimmer of hope for revival was extinguished.
He was well and truly dead.
As Lumian spoke, he drew his revolver and trained it on the nearby Guardian.
Disoriented and reeling, the Guardian instinctively condensed a broadsword of light. Dropping to one knee, he plunged it into the ground before him.
The sword merged with the earth, erecting an impenetrable invisible wall.
As a gravekeeper merged with a dream projection, this Guardian had no effective defense against the Symphony of Hatred. His companions, the Spirit Warlocks and Soul Assurers, caught off guard by the attack, couldn't pull him into a dream in time to avoid the melody's direct impact. He could only rely on his own physical and spiritual fortitude to withstand the detonation of desire and emotion.
For Beyonders with dream projections, this assault posed a mortal threat.
Before the gravekeeper could regain his bearings, another incandescent white fireball wreathed in lightning struck him, triggering a violent explosion.
Fortunately, his boon as a Guardian spared him the fate of his companions, who were culled like stalks of wheat. Without it, he would have been unable to mount even a token defense on pure instinct.
Lumian's green eyes took on an iron-black cast as he stood tall and squeezed the trigger.
Bang! Bang!
Twin yellow bullets, trailing blazing white flames and silver lightning, slammed into a single point on the invisible wall.
Rumble!
The already destabilized wall shattered. The Guardian could only watch helplessly as a searing white spear enveloped in lightning hurtled towards him, piercing his chest and sending him flying.
Another Cull, another bout of digestion.
Clinging to the last shreds of consciousness, the Guardian scattered the broadsword of light into countless minuscule fragments.
These luminous shards coalesced into a hurricane that raged in all directions.

Hounded by the storm of light, the blazing white flaming spear soared twenty to thirty meters before finally coming to rest.
As the flames ebbed away, Lumian straightened his posture, clad in a white shirt, black vest, dark trousers, and a golden straw hat.
Behind him, the bright and terrifying Hurricane of Light gradually petered out, thinning the ground. The corpses of the fallen gravekeepers and "Hisoka" Twanaku lay broken and strewn about.
Reeling from the Symphony of Hatred's influence, his injuries abnormally severe, Devajo's gaze flicked from the bodies littering the ground to Lumian, who stood facing him from afar. His already pallid complexion turned even more ashen.
What in the world is happening?
Is he even human?
Devajo, in whom thoughts of vengeance had fleetingly stirred following the blow, swiftly abandoned any such notions. Igniting the sulfurous blood he had spat out with azure flames, he hastily retreated into the forest.
He wanted to escape!
In any case, he could offer no aid to the human skin the archduke had crafted through ritual. Lingering in the vicinity of the black ancient tomb would only expose him to greater peril.
Lumian paid no heed to Devajo's flight. Though weakened, his spirituality remained abundant. Transforming once more into a blazing white flaming spear, he traversed dozens, nearly a hundred meters in a blink, coming to rest beside Lugano, Amandina, and his companions.
The four Beyonders lay unconscious, spared the Symphony of Hatred's melody—the effects were minimal, a mere nightmare, but still wracked them with pain. Their contorted expressions gradually eased as they roused from their comatose state.
Seeing them open their eyes and regain their faculties, Lumian instructed, "Leave this place at once and return to Tizamo. Find somewhere to lay low."
The conflict unfolding before the black ancient tomb was not something Lugano and the others could influence. Lumian himself dared not approach, so he intended to send his four temporary allies to safety.
He had previously consented to Camus and Rhea accompanying him, believing the former's Psychic Piercing and the latter's Lightning Arrows could synergize effectively with his own abilities to counter Hisoka's dream projection, Reaza, and the others. Amandina's power to compel others into dreams was also quite useful. Moreover, following her was the only way to approach the black ancient tomb without falling prey to the invisible figure's

attacks. To his surprise, Hisoka had displayed combat prowess far exceeding Padre Cali's. With the area unsealed and devoid of preset traps, not only had Camus, Amandina, and the rest failed to render aid, they had ended up hindering each other and becoming a liability.

Reflecting on his two prior battles—the attempt to capture Hisoka alive and the confrontation with Padre Cali—Lumian grasped a fundamental principle.

At times, there was strength in numbers. But in other situations, solitude was preferable. Facing different foes under varied circumstances demanded adaptability, lest one court disaster by adhering to a fixed approach.

Lumian recalled a maxim Emperor Roselle had once shared, as explained by his sister Aurore:

In warfare, as in the flow of water, there are no constant conditions.

"We can return to Tizamo? Even me?" Lugano couldn't contain his pleasant surprise. Instinctively, he extended his remaining hand, pressing the flickering light against Lumian's wounds.

As a Doctor, Lugano was unable to treat a patient's internal organs directly. He needed to open the cavity and make contact with the injured site. It was akin to performing surgery.

Lumian nodded and replied,"Indeed, but you'll need to remain under Camus and Rhea's supervision."

He planned to linger a while longer, to see if he could aid Iveljsta Eggers, a member of the Church of The Fool's temperance faction.

It was the duty of a Tarot Club's Minor Arcana card holder.

Of course, Lumian had no intention of venturing into the area immediately fronting the black ancient tomb. He might well perish before even realizing what had struck him. His aim was to ascertain whether he could sway Reaza and the others to interact with the corresponding godhood items, or utilize the golden mask upon Hisoka's corpse to some end.

At that moment, Devajo, who had only just arrived in Tizamo that very night, had already vanished back into the forest, retracing his steps.

Mustering his dwindling strength, he started sprinting.

As he ran, Devajo abruptly halted, casting a perplexed gaze towards the path's bend, obscured by the trees.

Beneath the dim, crimson moonlight, a short figure approached.

It was a boy of seven or eight years, garbed in blue pajamas speckled with yellow stars and a matching nightcap. His plump face and the short blond hair peeking out from under the cap were smeared with cream, blood, biscuit crumbs, cake fragments, and

sundry other substances. His brown eyes blazed with intense hunger and desire.
In his mouth, a vibrant, cold, and slick viper's tail writhed and shook as he gulped it down, segment by segment.
The boy's cheeks bulged as he chomped vigorously.
In the next instant, he caught sight of Devajo.
A wave of intense, terrifying malice flooded Devajo's mind.
...
Lugano, having secured permission, was on the verge of informing Camus, Rhea, and Amandina of their impending return to Tizamo when a petrified scream rang out from the forest.
They froze in their tracks.
Mere seconds later, a pitch-black monstrosity, towering nearly three meters tall with curved goat horns, came barreling out of the forest. It charged from the direction of Tizamo, making a beeline for the black ancient tomb, panic etched in its every movement.
That man just now? He's a Devil too... A minion of the Nois family's Demon, perhaps? Could the green-eyed figure fashioned from human skin be a manifestation of the Nois family's Demon, projected into the Dream Festival? Lumian's gaze shifted to the shadowed forest at the Devil's back, an ominous feeling washing over him.
He made a snap decision and addressed Lugano, Amandina, and the others.
"Grab hold of me!"
Lugano swiftly returned to Lumian's side, seizing his arm.
Camus, Rhea, and Amandina followed suit, startled but mimicking Lugano's action.
The five of them winked out of existence, reappearing in close proximity to Hisoka's corpse.
The instant Amandina's form finished coalescing, her eyes flew wide.
Voice quavering, she turned to Lumian and said in a deep voice, "T-that figure... it's appeared once more..."

Chapter 692: Death before Rebirth

Appeared once more? Lumian motioned for Lugano and the others to loosen their hold and inquired of Amandina, "Where is he?"
Amandina's sky-blue eyes locked onto the entrance of the black ancient tomb situated at the terminus of the motionless river.
"He's sitting cross-legged over there."
As the words left her lips, Amandina shut her eyes and turned away. Minuscule protrusions emerged from her previously flawless and supple skin, each on the cusp of rupturing and giving rise to something unknown.
This reaction stemmed from her glimpse of the phantasmal, stagnant river and the ashen-white goat adorned with a golden mask, grappling to traverse the shallow waters.
The pallid goat's limbs, devoid of all fur, were extensively decomposed, exuding a nauseating yellow pus that swiftly encroached upon the remainder of its body.
Under the sway of the Symphony of Hatred, Reaza's wan and frigid countenance surrendered its final vestige of color.
The decay gradually consumed the back of his hand, neck, and cheeks, lending him the appearance of a long-deceased cadaver.
This decelerated the deterioration afflicting the pale goat's body.
Concurrently, the still river conjured by the black ancient tomb grew ever more illusory, its breadth and depth visibly diminishing.
The rag doll, shrouded in a sinister Gothic gown, drifted onward once more, shadowing the retreating river of quietude.
Abruptly, it pivoted to regard the green-eyed man composed of human flesh and blood, who, coincidentally, reciprocated its gaze.
Loathing, enmity, and lunacy erupted from the sinister cloth doll's crimson eyes. Its black Gothic attire, ensnared by baleful vines, ruptured into myriad holes, scattering fabric shreds and leaving it in tatters.
The green-eyed man in the dark gray suit seemed unscathed, yet as he advanced, he imprinted two footsteps saturated with vivid red blood, the aroma of sulfur swiftly dissipating.
One stride, two strides, three strides. Each step emblazoned bright red footprints, while dark fluid seeped from his human skin.
Iveljsta Eggers at last recovered from the onslaught of emotions and cravings unleashed by the Symphony of Hatred. He cast a glance at the tattered evil cloth doll and retrieved an object from his concealed pocket--a palm-sized puppet.
The puppet appeared to have been stitched together by a young child's hand. Its limbs were askew, its legs reaching its posterior, and its visage daubed with red, yellow, and white pigments,

evoking the image of a circus clown.
Iveljsta infused the misshapen puppet with his spirituality.
It shimmered into intangibility and vanished from his grasp, materializing within the dark brown eyes of the Eggers family scion before vaulting into the green orbs of the man clad in human skin.
This caused the figure in the dark gray suit to stiffen and decelerate.
Lumian dared not prolong his gaze and hastily averted his eyes.
As Amandina closed her eyes and turned away, the minute protuberances adorning her skin receded.
Intrigued, she stole a glance at the monstrosity, suspected to be a Devil, hurtling towards the green-eyed man, seemingly on the precipice of succumbing to terror. She swiftly surveyed her environment.
Her eyes then fell upon the colossal Devil's incomplete carcass sprawled on the ground and a charred bone flute that had tumbled beneath a palm tree.
"There, there's something over there," she whispered, tugging at Lumian's sleeve.
Could it be a potent artifact discarded by a gravekeeper?
Lumian peered over and murmured to Amandina and the others, "Feign ignorance. Refrain from touching or even nearing it."
He had purposely abandoned the Symphony of Hatred there, deferring its retrieval.
In such circumstances, wielding it anew was far more prone to endangering his allies than exploiting an adversary's vulnerability. As a Reaper, he had no need to employ the Symphony of Hatred to pierce the target.
Thus, he feigned a lack of opportunity to reclaim it, hoping an enemy would attempt to turn it against him.
If a similar scenario unfolded, Lumian and the three godhood items would be the sole survivors capable of weathering the ensuing cataclysm unleashed by the Symphony of Hatred. At that juncture, he would whisk Amandina and her companions away via teleportation. Upon later return, he anticipated discovering the enemies' lifeless husks and acquiring fresh spoils of war.
It was a trap he had laid in passing.
As Devajo, transformed into a colossal Devil, retreated to the proximity of the human-skinned man and drew near the ebbing river of silence, a short silhouette walked out from the forest trail--a boy of seven or eight years old, clad in endearing sleepwear and a nightcap. His yellow hair and countenance were begrimed, besmirched with grease, dregs, and blood.

Catching sight of the boy, Lugano experienced a piercing agony in his absent right hand.
"Man... Man... Man...." He gnashed his teeth in dread.
Observing his abnormal reaction, Camus and the others inquired in astonishment, "What's wrong?"
Tracing Lugano's line of sight, Amandina, Camus, and Rhea spotted the boy.
The former swiveled to Lumian in bewilderment, "Isn't, isn't that your godson? Why is he here? It's very dangerous!"
"No, he's not in danger." Camus recollecting Kolobo's exaggerated reaction upon encountering Louis Berry and his godson. He recalled some of the words of his companion from the Fate pathway and said with a solemn expression, "We should be the ones in danger."
Without waiting for Amandina and Rhea's misgivings, Camus regarded Lumian and knitted his brow.
"What do we do?"
As a godfather, you should have a way to control your godson, right?
Lumian's gaze flitted to Ludwig pursuing the Devil, then to the corpses and Hisoka's Devil form strewn on the ground. He replied with a grin, "It's not a big problem."
There was ample food here to form an effective seal!
As to why Ludwig had trekked to the black ancient tomb, Lumian roughly had an idea.
The man and woman who had freshly arrived in Tizamo tonight and taken lodging at the Brieu Motel were likely minions of the Nois family's Demon. By some means, they maintained lucidity in this special dream. Once the Dream Festival commenced, they left the motel and hastened towards the black ancient tomb.
During this process, they passed the second floor, inducing Ludwig to catch wind of delicacies. He forsook the insipid fare and shadowed them closely, matching the pace of a seven- or eight-year-old child.
At that moment, Ludwig's brown eyes were fixed solely on Devajo, the Devil.
"Why isn't it a big problem?" Amandina wore a look of skepticism.
Lumian smiled and indicated the massive Devil who had fled in proximity to the green-eyed man.
"He's here to hunt down that monster."
"Hunt? Him?" Amandina glanced left and right in confusion.
A seven- or eight-year-old boy in azure star-spangled sleepwear, pursuing a pitch-black Devil almost three meters in height, with curved goat horns and bat wings sprouting from his back? This is

indeed a dream, right?
As he neared the green-eyed man formed of human flesh and blood and the black ancient tomb, Devajo sensed a tinge of respite. Yet, his mind remained haunted by visions of his tongue roasting, his brain scooped out by a soup spoon, and his arms and legs gnawed by the boy.
What kind of monster is this? Devajo watched in abnormal fear as the boy strode towards him.
At that juncture, Amandina, who had stolen a glance their way, exclaimed, "That figure is looking at the man in the black robe."
Iveljsta? Lumian peered over but discerned nothing amiss with Iveljsta Eggers.
Amandina averted her gaze, taking a moment to regain her composure before looking again.
She quickly explained, "He's not looking at the man in the black robe. He's looking at the Devil!"
Amandina abruptly halted, withdrawing her gaze and furrowing her brow.
"That figure seems to utter something... I don't know the language, but I understand the meaning."
"What did he say?" Lumian pressed.
Amandina dared not look towards the black tomb. She organized her thoughts and said,
"Basically, it means:
"Everyone in the world knows that crawling insects can spin cocoons. After the cocoon fractures, butterflies take wing.
"A common insect can transform into a fluttering butterfly and alter its form of life. Why?"
Unknowingly, Amandina's voice shifted, as if swayed by some influence.
She paused for a moment before answering the question in a low, cold voice, "Death before rebirth. Ascension into godhood..."
Before Amandina could finish her sentence, Devajo, in his Devil state, stiffened.
He beheld his flesh swiftly decaying, fragments sloughing off to bare ghastly white bones.
Within seconds, the Devil lost consciousness and crumbled into a mound of putrefying flesh and bones.
The remains fused as if alive, intertwining to form a human-sized cocoon.
It rapidly shattered, and a human-headed avian monster draped in white plumage emerged.
After absorbing all the flesh and blood, the monster expanded significantly, its form undergoing a transformation.

The lower portion of its head rapidly elongated and expanded, as if possessing a body of its own. The flesh at its "waist" melded with the avian body, mantled in pale-yellow feathers.

"Hahaha!" Devajo, with innumerable white feathers sprouting from his eyes, nostrils, visage, and fingertips, erupted into laughter.

He slapped the white-feathered bird body below and soared skyward, as if riding it.

Devajo ascended higher and higher, gradually turning ethereal. Then he spiraled downward and entered the black ancient tomb.

Witnessing this, Lumian glanced once more at the entrance of the black ancient tomb but still could not perceive the unseen figure Amandina had mentioned.

His heart stirred as he took two steps forward and retrieved the peculiar golden mask from Hisoka's corpse.

Chapter 693: Golden Corpse

Lumian looked at the gold mask in his hand, white and black paint covering the eyes and face. Without hesitation, he put it on.

A cold sensation quickly seeped into his skin, and the weight of the gold felt unusually real.

His mind spun as he gazed through the mask at the entrance of the black ancient tomb and the end of the still river, which had mostly receded.

This time, he finally saw a slightly indistinct figure.

The figure wore a strange rusted iron crown and a dark robe with peculiar patterns. Its skin was milky-white, and its eyes were so dark they seemed to hold the entire night. A pale-white beard fluttered around its mouth and chin.

The old man sat cross-legged, hands tucked into his sleeves. He leaned against the open door of the black ancient tomb, his expression cold and impassive, like a statue.

As Lumian looked over, the old man met his gaze. His dark eyes seemed to reflect Lumian, as if numerous phantoms had appeared.

Splash!

Behind the old man, an even more illusory, nearly lightless water wave rippled in the void. The colossal figure in blood-stained armor roared angrily, attempting to approach.

Lumian's right palm instantly burned.

The old man in the rusted iron crown and strange robe withdrew his hands from his sleeves.

His hands had pale, dark skin that was still smooth. The backs were cracked, each crack either covered in white feathers stained with pale yellow oil or dripping with decaying yellow pus.

Upon seeing this, Lumian's thoughts vanished, and he felt as if he were descending into endless cold darkness.

A familiar burning sensation emanated from his left chest. Combined with the burning, frenzied, violent sensation in his right palm, it awakened Lumian's consciousness, allowing him to find a lifeline in the darkness.

Using this opportunity, Lumian regained the ability to think. He saw nearly black blood vessels protruding from the dark eyes that seemed to hide the entire night. They were tainted with madness that threatened to bury and end everything.

The eyes closed, and the illusory ripples and colossal figure behind the old man vanished.

Lumian's vision began to clear, and his perception of the outside world fully returned.

A sharp pain coursed through him.

Lumian glanced down at his right hand and realized disgusting bumps bulged from his wrist to the back of his hand. His hair seemed to have thickened and turned whiter.
He flipped his palm over and saw that the mark left by Blood Emperor Alista Tudor's remnant aura had completely surfaced. It was a vivid red.
Surrounding these marks was decaying flesh, seeping pus, and pale-white skin.
Lumian frowned.
Despite the Blood Emperor's remnant aura being fully activated, Amandina, Lugano, and the others around him didn't show any signs of panic or fear. He didn't sense any extremely frenzied or violent thoughts either!
Wait...
The figure in the blood-stained armor seems to be Blood Emperor Alista Tudor...
This place feels similar to the Samaritan Women's Spring... Could the figure sitting at the tomb's entrance be the Underworld Daoist mentioned by the Armored Shadow?
Why are he and the Blood Emperor appearing here again? Shouldn't they be at the source of the Samaritan Women's Spring? Are the two connected?
Did the Underworld Daoist discover the Blood Emperor's residual aura on me and conveniently seal it? Even if I fully activate it, I won't be able to unleash the crazy Red Priest's aura?
Uh, I don't know if it's because of Mr. Fool's seal or because I'm wearing Hisoka's golden mask, but the Underworld Daoist didn't directly allow me to undergo immortal ascension, nor did he force me to lose control...
Lumian quickly grasped his predicament. As the immortalized Devil entered the black ancient tomb, the situation inside changed once more.
The tomb, which had fallen silent, emitted a rustling sound, accompanied by the clang of metal colliding with stone.
The next instant, a golden figure materialized beside the Underworld Daoist at the tomb's entrance.
The figure was covered in gold, with long limbs and a golden mask streaked with white and black paint.
It belonged to the same type as the one on Lumian's face and the pale-white goat's head!
The golden-masked figure stiffened, as if its limbs were dead. Relying solely on the strength of its waist, it sat up from lying flat like a corpse.
Eyes closed, it turned its head towards the pale-white goat closest

to it.
The pale-white goat's aura instantly turned ordinary, making it unable to walk on the still river. It rapidly decayed, sank, and quickly vanished.
The golden figure, eyes still closed, turned its head to the tattered, sinister cloth doll.
The eerie vines on the cloth doll's Gothic dress suddenly came alive, coiling around the doll, rendering it powerless and immobile.
The corpse's head turned to the slowly walking green-eyed man.
The green-eyed man, his eyes reflecting the ugly puppet, suddenly halted. With a bang, his body transformed into a bloody piglet.
The ugly puppet landed beside the piglet, motionless, as if it had turned into the most ordinary and common puppet.
Ludwig's eyes lit up as he jogged over.
He leaped up like a massive frog and pounced on the bloody piglet. He grabbed its head and bit down.
Amandina closed her eyes in shock.
Louis Berry's godson turned out to be such a monster?
The pig wailed fiercely. The golden-masked corpse closed its eyes, turned its head, and faced Iveljsta Eggers.
Lumian's forehead throbbed. He wanted to break through the sudden paralyzing pressure and teleport over to rescue Iveljsta, but he hesitated.
Previously, he had restricted himself from approaching the black ancient tomb. At most, he would take a glance or two. Now, he didn't want to break this self-imposed "rule." Violating it meant immense risk.
However, Iveljsta was from the Church of The Fool.
Just as Lumian made his decision, the golden corpse turned its head again, but Iveljsta remained unchanged. He was still severely injured, his aura weak.
What's going on? Why did the cold corpse in the ancient tomb spare Iveljsta? The Underworld Daoist didn't do anything to him when he looked at him... Lumian was puzzled as the corpse's golden mask faced Reaza.
After the pale-white goat vanished, Reaza summoned an undead creature to envelop him and blinked to the edge of the ancient tomb area. He was about to escape into the forest, but before he could do anything else, his body froze.
Pop, pop, pop. Huge, wet warts erupted from Reaza's face, neck, and the backs of his hands, accompanied by disgusting mucus.
The vice-captain of Port Pylos's patrol collapsed, rapidly disintegrating into countless bloody warts that squirmed in the

gaps of his thin suit.
The undead creature summoned by Reaza transformed into thin human skin and gently landed.
Lumian's scalp tingled as he watched. Finally, he broke free from the paralysis caused by the corpse sitting up. He said to Lugano, Amandina, and the others,"Grab hold of me!"
He was about to teleport back to Tizamo!
At that moment, the corpse's golden-masked face turned towards him.
Lumian's body turned cold. Ignoring Camus and company, he immediately activated the black mark on his right shoulder.
Suddenly, he saw the cold corpse's face, its eyes peeking out from under the golden mask with white and black paint, open.
It was a pair of cold, icy-blue eyes.
Icy-blue eyes? Lumian was taken aback, finding them familiar.
These are...
These are Naboredisley's eyes!
Dammit, why is Naboredisley here? *Why is he a cold corpse in the black ancient tomb?*
What right does He have to bestow the Beyonder powers of the Prisoner pathway?
It can't be real. It's not Naboredisley, but its eyes resemble...
Amidst Lumian's thoughts, he saw a smile in the icy-blue eyes, a smile of playfulness, understanding, and certainty.
This was a stark contrast to the pained expressions in the icy-blue eyes on Hanth Island.
Suddenly, a half-withered, violently beating dark-red heart soared from the golden corpse's hand and flew out of the completely disintegrated still river.
A short figure pounced on the heart like a frog and grabbed it. It was Ludwig, his mouth filled with blood.
The smile in the golden corpse's icy-blue eyes grew more relaxed.
He nodded at Lumian and willingly fell back to His original position. He had no intention of seizing the opportunity to leave the black ancient tomb.
With a splash of illusory water, the tomb's open door gradually closed.
Seated by the door, the figure suspected to be the Underworld Daoist vanished.
Wh— Naboredisley's corpse doesn't seem willing to leave the tomb... *How did He end up lying in there?* Lumian couldn't figure out the reason, so he looked at Ludwig and realized the boy was holding a half-withered dark-red heart to his mouth.
Lumian wanted to stop him but lacked the ability. The

surrounding corpses didn't seem to attract Ludwig as much as the half-withered heart.
Clang!
The tomb door slammed shut, causing the entire area to tremble.
Lumian and the others witnessed dream fragments one after another, and their surroundings blurred.
After a brief daze, Lumian realized he was lying in the middle of an unlit street. The crimson moon was bright in the sky, casting its light.
This was inside Tizamo.

Chapter 694: A "Deal"

The Dream Festival came to an abrupt end? Lumian jolted upright, realizing he was holding the strange golden mask he had received from Hisoka.

For a moment, he couldn't tell if he was still dreaming or if the mask had somehow followed him from the dream into the waking world.

Lumian turned to look behind him.

Reaza and Maslow, who had died during the Dream Festival, were lying in the middle of the street, just starting to regain consciousness.

Taking advantage of the moment while they gathered their wits and slowly got to their feet, Lumian focused his attention on their luck.

He could see clear signs of death on both of them. Their fates were about to undergo a rapid transformation, irreversibly tainted by darkness.

Reaza's luck, in particular, was changing even more swiftly and dramatically, like a river suddenly plunging over a cliff to form a waterfall.

At that instant, Reaza remembered what had happened to him during the Dream Festival. Uncontrollable fear washed over his pale, cold face.

Pop, pop, pop. Huge, mucus-oozing warts erupted all over his body, just as Lumian had witnessed in the dream.

Seeing Reaza's eyes turn frenzied and his body start to disintegrate, Lumian raised his free right hand, pointing it at Reaza's mouth as if it were a gun.

A condensed bullet of blazing white flame shot from Lumian's fingertip, shattering Reaza's teeth as it entered his mouth.

Boom!

Reaza's head split apart inch by inch, engulfed in roaring flames.

The vice-captain of Port Pylos's patrol team collapsed heavily, his body covered in a thin black suit made up of countless slimy warts.

Lumian turned to Maslow, who was shocked by Reaza's grotesque transformation and terrified by the death he had experienced in the dream. Calmly, Lumian asked, "Who was he working for?"

As he spoke, Lumian tucked the golden mask into his Traveler's Bag and checked to make sure the Symphony of Hatred and his other belongings were still there.

Everything was accounted for, including the food he had thrown at Ludwig.

Maslow paused for a few seconds before answering, "We're all part of the Numinous Episcopate."
Numinous Episcopate... Lumian chuckled. "Do you still believe in Death?"
Wasn't Death already dead?
Maslow considered the question for a moment before saying, "Reaza told me that Death is on the verge of returning. There have been signs recently that prayers are being answered again."
Hearing Maslow's words, Lumian nodded pensively.
"Which faction of the Numinous Episcopate do you belong to?"
As far as he knew, the Numinous Episcopate was divided into numerous factions. There were the Royals, led by the descendants of the Eggers family, who sought to restore the Balam Empire's rule; the Artificial Death faction, which had somehow recreated Death itself; and the less influential Repose and Underworld factions.
"We're from the Royal faction," Maslow admitted.
"Did you infiltrate the patrol team on purpose?" Lumian asked nonchalantly.
Maslow shook his head.
"No, Admiral Querarill has been secretly working with us."
Admiral Querarill, the de facto ruler of Matani, is closely tied to the Numinous Episcopate's Royal faction... Combined with the Church of Earth Mother and the remaining Intis faction, this must be what Franca meant by dancing on three eggs. Judging by the situation, Reaza wasn't a traitor after all... It's no wonder Admiral Querarill didn't send backup. If the Numinous Episcopate and the Church of The Fool can't handle the problem, it won't matter how many people he sends... His mind now clear, Lumian asked, "Was participating in this Dream Festival a direct order from the Royal faction's upper ranks?"
"Yes." Maslow glanced at Reaza's body, now unrecognizable as human, and said, "Apparently the order came straight from the Empress."
Empress... The Pale Empress of the Numinous Episcopate's Royal faction? Lumian instinctively scanned his surroundings.
A sudden thought struck him. He drew the straight sword he had bought in Port Santa, picked up Reaza's clothes, and quickly searched through the items he had left behind.
There was no sign of the death-corroded golden mask or the crystal-like skull.
Even though the skull had turned into a goat in the dream and the golden mask had sunk into the tranquil river, Lumian reasoned that it had still been a dream, after all. No matter how unusual it

was, it was ultimately just a dream. When someone died, they died in reality, but the same might not hold true for objects. It was similar to how some of the food Ludwig had eaten in the dream had reappeared in the Traveler's Bag.
Even if the items were going to disappear, it would have to happen later. For now, they should definitely return to the real world!
However, Reaza had nothing on him.
A chill ran down Lumian's spine. Lowering his voice, he asked, "Termiboros, did you notice anything?"
Termiboros's majestic voice echoed in Lumian's ears."Do you only now know fear?"
"Tch." Lumian felt a lingering sense of dread, but he didn't let it show. "Was the Pale Empress watching?"
Termiboros replied in a deep tone, "It's not just Her."
Her? The Pale Empress is an Angel? Lumian composed himself and turned his attention back to Maslow.
Just as Maslow was wondering why Louis Berry was talking to himself, the other party suddenly asked, "Why did Reaza kill you?"
Maslow stayed quiet, offering no response.
Lumian chuckled. "Did you betray him?"
Maslow's lips trembled, but he didn't say a word.
Lumian smiled casually and said, "It doesn't matter. If you don't want to answer, don't. You won't be alive much longer anyway."
Maslow's face turned ashen as he considered the ramifications of his death during the Dream Festival.
Lumian nodded, then added, "Go on and do whatever you want. Just don't do anything bad. It'll make you die sooner."
With that, Lumian glanced at Reaza's corpse, which was starting to produce the Beyonder characteristic. Greed welled up inside him, but he suppressed it with an Ascetic's self-
control.
He decided that regardless of whether Reaza had been a traitor or not, his Beyonder characteristics should be left for Camus and the Matani patrol team.
To stop himself from giving in to greed and with a grave matter coming to mind, Lumian's expression shifted subtly. He activated the black mark on his right shoulder and teleported away.
Maslow stared at the street that had been empty a moment before and the lights that had been stirred by the explosion, looking as though his soul had left his body. With a dazed and despondent expression, he turned and walked toward the forest outside Tizamo.
...
In the second-floor suite of the Brieu Motel.

The instant Lugano woke up, he noticed he couldn't move his right forearm.
It's okay, it's okay. I'll be fine after a psychiatric treatment or two. The people in Tizamo can be healed by Mass without needing Beyonder effects... Lugano tried to console himself as he endured the pain in his right forearm.
Just then, he heard hurried footsteps coming from the living room outside his door.
Crack!
The door to Lugano's bedroom flew open. In the crimson moonlight pouring through the window, Ludwig appeared, dressed in blue pajamas with yellow stars and a matching nightcap. He was clutching a half-withered, blood-stained, dark red heart.
Badump! Badump!
Lugano could hear his own heart pounding, and he felt like his soul was about to abandon his body out of sheer terror.
Had Ludwig come back for seconds because he had woken up early and hadn't gotten his fill during the dream?
A moment later, Lugano saw a figure float in through the doorway. The figure was semi-transparent, wearing an elaborate, opulent, black dress. There was no head on its neck, just a clean cut. In its hand, it held four identical blonde heads with red eyes and beautiful features.
"Return..." "It"... "To"... "Me"...
The four heads uttered different words in ancient Feysac, forming a complete sentence.
Ludwig's image was reflected in their eight crimson eyes.
"Mine!" Ludwig ran to Lugano's bed and spun around, looking like he wanted to bring the heart to his mouth, but he seemed to hesitate.
The four heads held by the translucent figure spoke one by one, "Idiot"... "Eating"... "Your"... "Own"... "Brain"...
"That"... "Is"... "My"... "Heart"...
"If"... "You"... "Don't"... "Return"...
"I"... "Will"... "Turn"... "You"... "Into"... "Pig"...
Almost at the same moment, Lumian materialized next to Ludwig, taking in the scene and hearing the corresponding words.
Lumian glanced at the strange-looking lady, then at Ludwig, who wore a resolute expression as if he would defend his food to the death. After a moment's consideration, Lumian said,
"Madam, perhaps you could try trading him other spiritually rich materials for it."
In Ludwig's current state, Lumian didn't dare try to take the item from him by force.

The lady in the intricate black dress, holding four blonde, red-eyed heads, went silent.
After a short while, one of her heads spat out a gleaming gold coin and held it between its teeth.
A gold coin? You want to buy it with a gold coin? Ludwig doesn't care about money... Lumian was about to point this out to the lady when he suddenly realized the gold coin looked familiar.
It was a Loen gold coin, worth 1 pound.
Uh... Lumian glanced over at Ludwig.
Ludwig wavered.
After a few seconds, he finally held out his hands and gave the half-withered dark red heart to the woman's head.
The blonde, red-eyed head let go, dropping the gold coin into Ludwig's hand. Quickly, it sank its teeth into the half-withered dark red heart.
The translucent lady stepped back and vanished from Lugano's bedroom.
Ludwig hastily popped the Loen gold coin into his mouth, as if trying to hide it in his stomach. But then he seemed to think better of it and fished it back out. He wiped it off on his pajamas and carefully put it in his pocket.
Just as I thought, it's the same as Jenna's lucky gold coin... A Loen gold coin closely connected to Mr. Fool? Lumian nodded to himself, comprehension dawning.
A twinge of disappointment ran through him.
Two people close to me have gotten lucky gold coins. *Why don't I have one?*

Chapter 695: Koloho's Worry

Lumian snapped out of his daze and glanced at Ludwig, who had regained his composure. Turning to Lugano, who was shrinking into a corner of the bed, he said, "We'll head back to Trier tomorrow and find a psychiatrist for you—a real, genuine one."

This decision wasn't made out of concern for Lugano, but rather something that had long been on Lumian's agenda. 007 should have already provided feedback in the early morning hours. Lumian, Franca, and the others would discuss how to handle the Mirror Person, Moran Avigny.

Moreover, Lumian intended to seize this opportunity to extract Termiboros's power and obtain a Fate Appropriator boon.

His most significant gain from the Dream Festival was the substantial digestion of the Reaper potion.

He knew the Southern Continent was filled with conflicts and combat opportunities, which would help him digest the Reaper potion. However, he never anticipated that less than two weeks after advancing, the potion's digestion progress would skyrocket, much like a mercury thermometer's column shooting up when touching a living person's armpit.

Culling Padre Cali, Hisoka's dream projection, and nearly 20 others bestowed with strength equivalent to Sequence 6 or Sequence 5 made Lumian acutely aware of life's fragility. It was like straw under a scythe, constantly collapsing with a simple cull and scattered by the wind.

Furthermore, after experiencing the acting of the first four Sequences, Lumian felt the Hunter pathway had a distinct characteristic of bringing calamity. Reapers were no exception.

With this acting, he believed the Reaper's destructive characteristics that brought calamity were more apparent.

At the same time, Lumian greatly benefited from an enemy's destruction.

As his mind raced, he summarized his first Reaper acting principle: "Culling is about destroying the target and reaping a harvest for yourself."

If I had three or four more similar culls, I wouldn't need to comprehend other acting principles and put them into practice to digest the Reaper potion. However, such good fortune is rare... Lumian sighed silently.

This required gathering more than ten Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 Beyonders with obvious flaws he could exploit without interference.

Meeting each of these conditions was challenging, let alone all of

them simultaneously:
First and foremost, whether humans consumed potions or gained superpowers through boons, their pathways and Sequences differed in their flaws. They couldn't all be burdened by dream projections like the gravekeepers in the Dream Festival, where emotions and desires exploded at the slightest trigger. Even if the bestowed were deeply influenced by evil gods and had mental issues to some degree, exploding emotions and desires weren't inevitable. Some might simply have mutated personalities.
Secondly, Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 Beyonders were uncommon, especially the latter, who formed the backbone of various factions. Even without factions, they could create their own teams and dominate a region like the Pirate Admirals. Gathering more than ten to twenty such Beyonders was no easy task.
Moreover, if a major incident caused the first two conditions to be met, the Beyonders' common flaws might not be countered by Lumian and his mystical items.
Finally, during the battle, a Sequence 5 Beyonder, a key member of the various factions, might draw the attention of the corresponding demigod.
A mysticism event like the Dream Festival, with its inherent limitations and natural problems, was unusually suitable for Lumian. Perhaps there had only been one such event in the Northern and Southern Continents in nearly a millennium.
Sigh... Lumian couldn't help but sigh again.
At that moment, Lugano was thrilled to hear he could return to Trier at dawn. He quickly replied, "Alright, alright!"
Back in Trier, his boss had more trusted companions. He probably wouldn't need to take care of Ludwig anymore!
Lumian thought for a moment and glanced at the curtains emanating the crimson moonlight. Casually, he asked Lugano, "Have you saved enough for the Harvest Priest potion formula and the corresponding ingredients?"
Lugano was taken aback.
"No, I'm still a bit short of the potion formula's price."
Most of his current "savings" came from Lumian, amounting to around 15,000 verl d'or. Based on his knowledge, a Sequence 7 potion formula usually cost between 16,000 to 20,000 verl d'or.
Lumian nodded pensively.
"I'll keep an eye out for the Harvest Priest potion formula and the necessary ingredients for you. If you're short on funds, I'll help cover the difference. Consider it a share of the spoils from this adventure."
Lugano was stunned momentarily before tears welled up in his

eyes, blurring his vision.
I made the right choice!
My future truly lies with the boss!
With a hint of unease, he asked, "But that was a dream adventure. Can the gains be brought back to the real world?"
Lumian didn't elaborate. He retrieved Hisoka's golden mask from his Traveler's Bag.
It's possible... Some special items are possible? Lugano felt a sense of relief.
Lumian turned to Ludwig, who seemed to have acquired a cherished toy, and nodded slightly.
"You may go back to sleep."
Ludwig, wearing a blue nightcap, blinked and reached out to touch his stomach.
Groan. Groan. His stomach churned violently.
Lumian laughed self-deprecatingly and took out the portion of food Ludwig had eaten in the dream, including almond pistachio cream cake, liquor-infused chocolate, éclairs, and more.
After Ludwig began his "quiet" meal, Lumian returned to his room and conjured a blazing white fireball. He unfolded the letter, picked up a fountain pen, and penned a letter to Madam Magician. This took precedence over dealing with other matters.
As he wrote, Lumian pondered something.
If I killed all the elders of the gravekeepers, would the primitive tribe still possess the ability to attack and eliminate the dead?
Or are they still alive in the real world, waiting to drag those already dead down with them when they attack Tizamo?
Or would the deceased find another way out, like the fire that had engulfed the Twanaku family?
...
On the third floor of the police headquarters in Tizamo Town.
Camus snapped out of his reverie and instinctively glanced at the temporary bed opposite him. He noticed the blanket had been lifted, and Kolobo was nowhere to be found.
Am I still dreaming, still in the Dream Festival? Camus sat up cautiously and heard a sound near the door in the corner.
In the darkness, under the crimson moonlight seeping through the curtains, he saw Kolobo crouched there, curled up and trembling.
Camus lowered his voice and gently asked, "What's wrong?"
Kolobo's voice quivered as he replied, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!"
The sky is falling? Camus found it amusing and looked at Kolobo. "Did you misinterpret your premonition?"
How could the sky possibly fall?

...
Outside Tizamo, at the edge of the primitive forest.
Maslow, his face adorned with white paint, slowly advanced into the forest.
It was a terrible feeling to know about his impending yet unavoidable death.
He regretted betraying the Numinous Episcopate, but there had been no choice. Shortly after arriving in Tizamo, he had been secretly controlled by Twanaku, who had returned for a "vacation."
He had become a fallen one monitoring the situation of Padre Cali and Tizamo.
Subsequently, although he knew Twanaku had been killed, the other party's dream projection appeared in his dream, telling him the matter wasn't over.
Maslow advanced step by step, yearning to return to the forest and become nourishment for a tree, just like his ancestors.
As he walked, he spotted nearly 20 people emerging from the nearby barracks.
The men seemed to sense something amiss and prepared to inspect their surroundings.
At that moment, Maslow felt the night suddenly brighten.
Subconsciously, he looked up at the sky and saw a burning boulder descending with a crimson flame tail.
In an instant, the burning boulder filled Maslow's vision.
It crashed into the area between the forest's edge and the barracks.
Rumble!
The wind and dust stirred by the meteorite swiftly filled the area, rising into the air and dissipating, obscuring the crimson moon and the starlight.
Rumble!
The entirety of Tizamo seemed to experience a violent earthquake. Buildings shook violently, and glass shattered.
Several houses with weak foundations quickly collapsed, burying their occupants.
With great difficulty, Camus regained his balance. Once the building stabilized, he rushed to the shattered window and looked out.
He saw the "sky" was gray and murky, so close he could touch it if he jumped up.
The "sky" has really fallen... For some inexplicable reason, this thought flashed through Camus's mind.
...
In the second-floor suite of the Brieu Motel.
Clutching the letter and fountain pen, Lumian watched the smoke

and dust outside with amusement, sensing the "heavy blow" not far away.
"How direct..." he sighed sincerely.
A meteorite had descended from the sky!
From the looks of it, the catastrophe had likely eliminated most of the deceased.
Lumian turned to look at the door, which had swung open due to the building's shaking, and saw Ludwig still focused on eating.
Nothing from the pile of food had fallen to the ground.
After sending Lugano out to assist the injured, Lumian returned to his room and continued writing.
Upon completion, he immediately set up a ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger.
Just as the "doll" messenger emerged from the expanding candle flame, it suddenly shrank.
Slowly, she glanced to her left and then to her right. After confirming there was no problem, she tiptoed and cautiously approached Lumian's letter.
Lumian had never seen the "doll" messenger act like this before. He watched in confusion and amusement as she picked up the folded letter like a thief. She waved at him and quickly retreated into the candle flame.
Lumian chuckled and shook his head, no longer pondering the "doll" messenger's actions.
At the very least, it seemed harmless, and he had several things to do.
Lumian left the bedroom, entered the corridor, and went to the first floor. He grabbed the motel owner, who had come out to check on the situation after waking up, and asked, "Which room are the lady and her companion who arrived tonight staying in?"

Chapter 696: Feathers

In Twanaku's house in Tizamo Town, Amandina woke up amidst the violent shaking of the building.

She stood up groggily and looked out the window. The sky had turned gray and was pressing down, completely obscuring the crimson moon and stars.

In the near-absolute darkness, Amandina turned and cast her gaze not far away. Dressed neatly, Robert rose slowly, his sluggish movements suggesting he was struggling to adapt to the lightless environment.

When the tremors in the ground and buildings finally ceased, Robert used his Spirit Vision to spot Amandina. After a moment's hesitation, he asked, "Are we awake?"

He recalled that before entering the Dream Festival, he and Amandina had used a date as an excuse to rendezvous. When they ended up in the special dream, they temporarily parted ways—one stayed put while the other went to Saint-Sien Cathedral.

Glancing at the suddenly noisy street outside, Amandina thought for a few seconds before replying, "Probably... but I don't know what's going on."

As Robert recalled the dream encounters, both fell silent. Eventually, he asked in a deep voice, "What happened to you in the end?"

Amandina suddenly chuckled. "Nothing much."

Robert closed his mouth again. With her night vision, Amandina looked at him, smiling with mixed emotions. "Is there anything else you want to ask?"

After a long pause, Robert said, "What did you experience afterward?"

Taking in the silence of the house, Amandina finally whispered, "I saw the one who granted me powers."

"The one who granted you powers?" Robert asked, surprised.

Amandina laughed. "We didn't actually fall asleep after touching the black ancient tomb. We only truly fainted after receiving the powers."

"How is that possible..." Robert looked incredulous.

Amandina didn't try to convince him. Instead, she muttered, "Upon acquiring superpowers, one immediately falls into a coma or slumber. When they wake up, they completely grasp that power. Their spirit and flesh undergo a certain transformation...

"Is this considered a low-level death before rebirth?"

"What are you talking about?" Robert's confusion grew.

It was completely incomprehensible!

Amandina's eyes darted around as she smiled.
"That person told me. Perhaps it's a form of guidance."
"Guidance..." Using his Spirit Vision, the only way to ascertain her condition in the darkness, Robert gazed at Amandina.
He felt his fiancée was different, as if she had grown up overnight.
Amandina wanted to recount the encounter in detail as usual, but swallowed her words.
Sighing, she said, "Aren't you going to check on Padre Cali? He might not have long to live."
Snapping out of his reverie, Robert blurted out, "He fled to the ancient tomb and was killed?"
"He's indeed dead," Amandina confirmed.
Robert's expression shifted, but he didn't inquire about the murderer's identity. After a moment's thought, Amandina said, "Before you go to Padre Cali, I need to tell you something.
"The desire you felt when you first faced him didn't come from your heart. He prayed to a Demon through a ritual and obtained the power to influence you."
Robert's eyes widened, his mouth gaped, but no sound came out.
Without further ado, Amandina strode past him towards the staircase.
Pressing down on the railing, she paused and tersely acknowledged, "Let's find an excuse to annul the engagement. I can accept other things about you, but I can't accept how my fiancé allowed me to follow Louis Berry alone to find the black ancient tomb under those circumstances.
"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone about your matters. Those who knew in my dream won't tell either."
Robert spun around, his gaze fixed on the staircase as Amandina descended step by step, the darkness engulfing her spirituality's light.
Leaving Twanaku's house, Amandina stepped onto the street.
She glanced at the dark, low sky, the sporadic lights on both sides, and caught a whiff of the dusty air.
With her hand covering her nose, Amandina made her way towards the manor, her steps gradually quickening.
...
On the third floor of the police headquarters in Tizamo Town, just as Camus felt Kolobo's trembling subside, as if he had composed himself, painful curses echoed from the next room.
His heart stirred as he lit a candle and pushed open the slightly deformed wooden door. Inside, he saw the Feysacian, Loban, lying on the ground, clutching his knee and screaming in agony.
The member of the Tizamo patrol team had woken from the

earthquake-like commotion and tried to get out of bed to find cover, but one leg strangely lost strength, accompanied by intense pain, causing him to collapse.
Before Camus could organize his thoughts, Rhea's voice echoed beside him.
"Don't worry. It's the mass hysteria mentioned in the investigations. You'll recover after going to the corresponding Mass."
Having cooperated with Camus to investigate the abnormalities in Tizamo, Loban quickly understood Rhea.
Cursing, he struggled to his feet, retrieved a military flask from under his pillow, and downed a few gulps of liquor.
After drinking until color returned to his face, Loban sighed with relief.
"I feel my knee has recovered a little. Sometimes, alcohol is more useful than Mass!"
Breathing a sigh of relief, Camus turned to Rhea, realizing his teammate's expression had turned colder.
After what just happened, her dream projection has completely vanished. Have the emotions and desires returned to her body? Will the special dreamscape still exist, and will there be a Dream Festival next year? Camus instantly made many connections.
At that moment, Rhea said to him, "Let's go out and see if we can save some people. Those who died during the Dream Festival shouldn't be the only ones injured."
Taken aback, Camus replied, "Okay."
Joy welled up in his heart, sensing Rhea hadn't undergone any fundamental changes due to the return of her emotions and desires.
...
Following the Brieu Motel owner's instructions, Lumian arrived on the fourth floor and opened the corresponding room's wooden door.
The near pitch-black darkness receded under a blazing white fireball's illumination, revealing everything to Lumian.
Some items had fallen due to the tremors, tables and chairs had shifted, and a small amount of dust had sprinkled from the ceiling. The window was tightly shut, but the glass had shattered. Apart from this, there was nothing noteworthy, and no sign of humans.
Scanning the area, Lumian found no trace of the man or woman.
Frowning, he muttered to himself, According to the original Dream Festival's rules, death in a dream doesn't equate to immediate death. Did they leave Tizamo after waking up? I planned to take

care of their corpses and inherit their Beyonder characteristics...
Lumian didn't believe the man and woman couldn't leave just because the door and window were tightly shut. After all, they were two Mid-Sequence Beyonders, and one was even a Devil. Perhaps they had special abilities to resolve that problem.
As Lumian contemplated searching for traces and chasing after them to eliminate the deceased on behalf of the Dream Festival, he casually examined the room's various details. Suddenly, his pupils dilated, and his eyes froze.
He saw a feather lying quietly under the recliner by the window
—a white feather stained with light-yellow oil!
Lumian's scalp tingled as he silently took two steps back into the corridor.
Like Reaza, were the man and woman already dead and had undergone an abnormality? *What about their corpses?*
Disappeared?
Would humans who had ascended to godhood exhibit different behaviors after leaving the Dream Festival?
With a blazing white fireball floating behind him, Lumian scrutinized the room, filled with questions. Perhaps the man and woman's "corpses" were still here, but he couldn't see them.
Cautiously entering, he approached the recliner, sensing nothing unusual and discovering no signs of the formless object. Lumian retrieved the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth from his Traveler's Bag, donning them one by one.
He still couldn't see the man and woman. His vision was filled with chaotic darkness, a dark river, oily feathers, and imprisoning darkness.
Upon returning to reality, did they immediately undergo immortal ascension and leave this place? Lumian pondered for a few seconds before activating the black mark on his right shoulder, teleporting to a spot in the forest at the special dream's periphery.
As a Hunter, Lumian had memorized the correct route and environmental characteristics after Amandina led him to the black ancient tomb. After nearly fifteen minutes, he arrived at an area where numerous tree roots protruded from the ground, resembling blood vessels.
However, the place where the black stone-like ancient tomb should have stood was empty.
Does that black ancient tomb only exist in dreams and can't be encountered in reality? Lumian speculated seriously. So the Pale Empress and the other Angels can't descend personally and can only send people to participate in the Dream Festival?
As his thoughts raced, Lumian's gaze darted back and forth across

the land corresponding to the black ancient tomb. It was indeed a little different from its surroundings—no intertwined tree roots protruded from the ground, and it was flat and stoneless.

Approaching thoughtfully, Lumian took out his straight sword and used it as a shovel, attempting to dig into the soil. Just as he dug a small pit, his eyelids twitched.

Buried in the dark brown soil were two white feathers stained with light-yellow oil!

Taking a slow breath, Lumian dug deeper.

Before long, a palm-sized, dark, slightly moist, and sticky soil lump came into view.

Chapter 697: Madam Magician's Explanation

As Lumian gazed at the peculiar soil, he couldn't help but recall the scene of Hela retrieving the Samaritan Women's Spring.

After a moment of contemplation, he retrieved gold bars and coins from his Traveler's Bag and ignited a blazing white fireball in his palm.

As the flames surged, the gold gradually melted under the control of his spirituality, forming a small golden box.

Lumian then used the flames as a blade to fashion a cover for the box.

Once the gold had cooled and solidified, he used the straight sword as a shovel to transfer the palm-sized clump of soil into the box before closing the lid.

After stowing away the golden box, Lumian noticed that the straight sword in his hand had become rusty and decayed.

Rather than being alarmed, Lumian was delighted. He muttered to himself, "That soil is indeed magical..."

This was one of his gains from the Dream Festival.

Despite not obtaining the Beyonder characteristics of Reaza and Maslow, and the mysterious disappearance of the man and woman who served the Demon, Lumian had finally acquired something of value.

He continued searching the area but found no other traces. Left with no other option, he teleported back to the second floor of the Brieu Motel.

By then, much of the smoke and dust caused by the meteorite had dissipated. The crimson moon's light cast an eerie glow over Tizamo.

Lumian noticed a folded letter on the master bedroom's desk, with a thin brass-like metal sheet on top.

Madam Magician's response is swift tonight... Lumian picked up the brass plate and examined the mysterious patterns and words etched upon it, but he couldn't discern their meaning or purpose. He couldn't even sense the corresponding spirituality glow.

Shaking his head, Lumian temporarily set aside the brass sheet. With a gentle grab of his right hand, he conjured a floating incandescent white fireball.

Under its glow, he sat down and began reading Madam Magician's reply.

"There's no doubt about it. From what you've described, the corpse in the dream tomb belongs to Naboredisley.

"As for Naboredisley, there's a high likelihood that it's an alias of Devil Monarch Farbauti or a real name that can be used under

certain circumstances.
"Don't you find it strange that Naboredisley, as a Devil Monarch and one of the eight ancient gods who once ruled the world, can bestow superpowers from the Prisoner pathway?
"This abnormality is quite normal for the ancient gods.
"They didn't advance according to the paths of the divine, but were born directly for some unknown reason. Their characteristics were a mix of Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristics from other pathways, or even more than one. Considering Demon Warlock Burman's situation, you can see how unhinged and violent the ancient gods were.
"There's a significant difference between ancient gods and subsequent true gods, but this doesn't mean that They are weak. They might even be stronger.
"Among them, although Farbauti is the Devil Monarch, He blends in Sequence 1 Abomination from a neighboring pathway. Therefore, His state is one of the best among the eight ancient gods. He has also become the only ancient god alive in Their original form.
"In fact, if Farbauti were to gather the ingredients of the Devil pathway as a Sequence 1 Abomination and complete the deity-ascension ritual to advance, He would be equivalent to a true god now—a stronger true god. He wouldn't be an ancient god described by words like madness, cruelty, violence, and bloodlust.
"Of course, as the Devil Monarch, even if He had done so, He will inevitably exhibit the characteristics of I am the Abyss, the Abyss is Me, experiencing strong influence from this pathway. As for the state of a Devil, you should be well aware. Therefore, Farbauti is also one of the two or three most unhinged ancient gods. This doesn't contradict His better state.
"That's all for the ancient gods. That's not my primary purpose in writing.
"In short, the one in the dream tomb is indeed Naboredisley, the other Naboredisley in the form of an Abomination."
Is that so... Ancient gods possess Beyonder characteristics of neighboring or non-neighboring pathways, and Naboredisley has already displayed the ability to separate different desires and emotions... Lumian no longer harbored any doubts about the cold corpse's ability to bestow Wraith powers.
After some thought, he reread Madam Magician's letter.
"You mentioned that Naboredisley took the initiative to lie back in the dream tomb and continue in a dead state. This is a very rational choice for Him.
"Furthermore, I must say it's a good death. Continue in this dead

state until after the apocalypse!
"You don't need to know the exact reason. To put it simply, you can see that Naboredisley, or the Devil Monarch Farbauti, is in a terrible state. As an Abomination, His demise is more suitable than Him living. It's better for both Him and this world.
"Of course, this can't be a simple death. He chose a good place to die. This will allow His corpse to enjoy peace and tranquility, safe from the Mother Tree of Desire's harassment.
"Now, you should understand. That entity had written a story and created a coincidence, allowing you to come into contact with Naboredisley in the Feynapotter Kingdom. Then, you went to Hanth Island and the New City of Silver. His goal was to send information to Naboredisley in the dream ancient tomb, allowing Him to continue sleeping and be a corpse instead of being resurrected. Simultaneously, this also prevents various factions from trying to obtain the Sequence 1 Beyonder characteristic.
"Tsk, as expected of a remnant from ancient times. He's the protagonist who personally ended the rule of the ancient gods. The secrets and various key matters He knows perhaps exceed all of us combined.
"Apart from Him and the Evernight Goddess, who else would know about mysticism festivals like the Dream Festival, which you forget when you wake up? Who would have thought that the corpse was part of the Devil Monarch?
"The substantial digestion of the Reaper potion, the acquisition of the golden mask, and the formation of the corroded soil should be the rewards He promised.
"Remember to give me that corroded soil. It's useless to you, but I can help you exchange it for something. It might also present an opportunity, but I can't discern what it is for now.
"And with that golden mask, you can boldly venture into the Underworld when the opportunity arises in the future. Otherwise, the living won't be able to stay in the Underworld for even a second.
"Those golden masks come from the fallen Death, the ancestor of the Eggers family. They were originally created to assist Death's direct descendants in entering and exiting the Underworld and Death's kingdom.
"Their purpose is twofold. Firstly, to protect the wearer from the corrosion of the aura of death. Secondly, to transform the wearer into an undead creature. Their bodies no longer have vital points, while their minds and consciousness can maintain their living state.
"Do you understand why Naboredisley's corpse wore the Death

mask? If it didn't, it would have died completely in the dream tomb, with no possibility of revival.
"Similarly, knowing the golden mask's functions and the state of the corpse, you should understand why Hisoka put on the golden mask. It allows a corpse to mistake Hisoka for one of its kind without affecting him. It also protects Hisoka from the corrosion of the tomb's aura of death.
"The first phantom that experienced an Ascension activated the corpse's sleeping spirit under the golden mask's protection, but without awakening His consciousness. In this state, Hisoka can use His resemblance to the corpse to make the corpse mistake Him for His spirit and accept His dominance. Isn't this style familiar? That Celestial Worthy is indeed the strongest god who seeks out errors and exploits loopholes.
"By the time the second phantom that underwent Ascension entered the dream ancient tomb, the corpse's consciousness would have been basically awakened. Even if Hisoka were still alive, he wouldn't be able to complete his grand plan.
"That's the gist of the matter. The Numinous Episcopate's purpose is the ancient tomb itself, the golden mask that has endured the corresponding corrosion in the tomb for over a millennium. The Nois family's archduke, a collaborator of the Rose School of Thought, desires Naboredisley's corpse, while the temperance faction seeks to retrieve Miss Messenger's heart. Their goals were actually different, yet they fought to the death. I have to say, it's quite humorous and ironic.
"Of course, this is mainly because they can't trust each other, and there's indeed a possibility that it's a situation where the winner takes all. Does Miss Messenger want to consume Naboredisley's Abomination body? Of course She does!"
Miss Messenger... The lady who used the lucky gold coin to buy the heart from Ludwig? *Why is she called Miss Messenger?* It's impossible for Her to be someone's messenger, right? She's an Angel! Uh... Mr. Fool's messenger? So that's why there's a lucky gold coin closely related to Mr. Fool... Lumian was sharp, and he quickly made a guess.
He continued reading the last part of the letter.
"I forgot to mention that wearing that golden mask also poses problems.
"As you can imagine, once you transform into an undead creature and don't have any vital points on your body, the purification of sunlight and lightning will be fatal to you. Moreover, if a living person wears that golden mask for too long, they will truly become deceased. When that time comes, once the mask is removed, their

mind and consciousness will be unprotected and they will die immediately.
"Let me see what else I haven't mentioned...
"Yes, you said that the Underworld Daoist and Naboredisley's corpse had looked at Iveljsta Eggers without doing anything to him. That gave me some ideas.
"It's highly likely that the one who helped bury Naboredisley's Abomination corpse and construct the dream grave was the ancestor of the Eggers family, the deceased Death.
"After He went mad, perhaps He interacted with the Underworld Daoist, who guarded the river and the Blood Emperor's afterimage. And for some reason, He agreed to Naboredisley's request for help, causing His Abomination corpse to slumber in a special dream.
"Therefore, be it the Underworld Daoist or Naboredisley's corpse, even if they only have their instincts left, they will still treat the Eggers family's bloodline specially."

Chapter 698: Aftermath

Considering Madam Magician's conjecture, Lumian suddenly felt that the deceased Death, the ancestor of the Eggers family, was indeed legendary.

After becoming a true god, He seemed to have gone mad. He incited the Pale Disaster. His demise created the Berserk Sea, isolating the Northern and Southern Continents for more than a millennium. He had a connection to the mysterious Underworld Daoist. He buried the Abomination corpse of the Devil Monarch. He left behind the massive Balam Empire with numerous descendants. The golden mask He created for His descendants to enter and exit the Underworld is still being fought over to this day...

Lumian retrieved the golden mask he had obtained from Hisoka from his Traveler's Bag. He caressed its cold surface and sighed silently.

This is a true deity's creation...

With a sigh, Lumian read the last two pages of the lengthy letter.

"Back to yourself. The Underworld Daoist mark on you only seals the influence of the Blood Emperor's remnant aura on the outside world. It doesn't eliminate its existence.

"In other words, you can no longer use Alista Tudor's remnant aura to scare others. However, it can still be useful when you need to verify your corresponding 'identity.'

"There are pros and cons to this situation. Although you've lost your potent means of intimidating others, you don't have to worry about attracting the attention of certain high-ranking individuals by using the Blood Emperor's remnant aura. Furthermore, the Underworld Daoist mark might have a special effect in the future.

"Emperor Roselle once said that since you can't resist, try to enjoy yourself."

Lumian turned his right hand over and looked at his palm. Compared to the decay in his dream, only a small pale-white mark remained. Beneath the pale-whiteness, a faint red scarred mark could be seen.

What special use can it have? To intimidate the undead? Lumian muttered to himself in puzzlement, momentarily at a loss.

At the end of the letter, Madam Magician wrote:

"This year's Dream Festival may have ended, but the special dream and ancient tomb haven't disappeared. The Dream Festival will still happen next year.

"When the time comes, the Demon from the Nois family and His Rose School of Thought allies, who confirmed the ancient tomb's situation this year, might continue their attempts. They might

even bring more targeted and powerful items, Beyonders, or projections.
"Not only do we have to stop them when the time comes, but we also have to make preparations in advance.
"Furthermore, for the special dream to still have dream projections as guardians, we can't relocate the entirety of Tizamo. Therefore, we have to do something for the people here.
"Of course, after completing the last task, the subsequent problems of the Dream Festival will have nothing to do with you unless you become an Angel by then. But isn't that too far-fetched?
"The last thing you need to do is enter that special dream with the half-finished brass charm I sent with the letter and perform the following ritual before the black ancient tomb.
"The complete process of the ritual is:
"..."
After carefully reading the ritual's description, Lumian assessed his spirituality and stowed away the half-finished brass charm.
Then, he retrieved the golden box containing the peculiar soil, unfolded the letter, and penned a reply:
"Honorable Madam Magician,
"I will follow your instructions and complete the ritual.
"This is that strange soil..."
Lumian paused and added:
"Remember to send back the box containing it."
It was made of gold!
Recalling Lugano's promise of compensation and Ludwig's growing appetite, Lumian, who was quite wealthy, felt the need to be frugal.
He didn't need to worry about the potion formula, Beyonder ingredients, or mystical items for the time being, but he needed to provide for two people now!
Furthermore, gold played an important role in mysticism. Franca had been accumulating gold in recent months, hoping to forge a golden body for "Armored Shadow" Chen Tu.
After writing the reply, Lumian set up a ritual and summoned the "doll" messenger.
The messenger remained cautious and furtive, not uttering a word.
What did it sense? Lumian was about to inquire when he suddenly thought of a possibility.
Could it be because Miss Messenger, whom Madam Magician mentioned, had been here?
They are both messengers, so they might know each other and be related. And that person is an Angel...

Lumian shut his mouth and watched as the "doll" messenger retreated into the candlelight with the golden box.
He extinguished the candle, stowed away the ritual-related items, and returned to the living room. He sat across from Ludwig, who still had half his food left untouched.
Lumian looked at Ludwig, who wore a blue pajama hat with yellow stars, and smiled.
"Lend me something."
Ludwig raised his head, his mouth moving as he inquired with his eyes.
Lumian maintained a friendly smile.
"The gold coin from earlier."
Ludwig lowered his head and focused on eating a piece of beef jerky, as if he hadn't heard Lumian.
"It'll only take half an hour. Yes, half an hour. I won't cause any harm. I'll definitely return it to you as it was," Lumian said with a sigh. "I've been providing for you for a long time, giving you food and drink..."
At this point, Lumian suddenly stopped. After a few seconds, he continued, "Isn't that worth lending me your lucky gold coin for half an hour? When have I ever lied to you?"
"Often," Ludwig mumbled.
He looked up at Lumian for a few seconds before retrieving the Loen gold coin from his pocket.
"Twenty minutes, tops."
"Deal!" Lumian swiftly accepted the lucky gold coin with a radiant smile.
To conserve his spirituality, he refrained from teleporting. Instead, he moved swiftly through the shadows and arrived at "Hisoka" Twanaku's house.
Robert and Amandina had already left.
Lumian found a spot and leaned against the wall. Using Cogitation, he quickly drifted off to sleep.
...
In the special dream, in the primitive forest.
Using the shadows in the darkness, Lumian reached the edge of the dream and found himself in the chaotic zone.
After some thought, he left the shadow and donned the golden mask crafted by Death.
Amidst the cold corrosion and heavy pressure, Lumian saw a dream fragment of a black ancient tomb and the path leading to it.
He quickly reached his destination. The corpses had vanished, leaving only the ancient tomb, resembling a black boulder, standing silently.

Lumian removed the mask and observed for a moment. Using a raised tree root as an altar, he placed candles, essential oil, herbal powder, a cauldron, and the half-finished brass charm on it. He followed the instructions in Madam Magician's letter and dealt with them one by one.
Finally, Lumian placed the lucky gold coin between the two candles corresponding to Mr. Fool.
Instead of creating a wall of spirituality, he lit the candles in the order from god to person, from left to right, and took two steps back.
Lumian gazed at the burning candle flame and recited in ancient Hermes,
"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck..."
Silently, a thin gray fog emanated from the void, enveloping the area around the black ancient tomb and the entire special dream.
Lumian's left chest heated up slightly, preventing his thoughts from slowing down, and his body showed no signs of disintegrating.
He quickly took two steps forward and ignited the corresponding essential oil extract and herbal powder. He placed the half-finished brass charm in the center of the altar.
Then, Lumian straightened up and said in Hermes, "I implore you,
"I implore you to grant this charm power.
"I implore you to allow this power to control this dream..."
After reciting all the remaining incantations and completing the remaining steps of the ritual, Lumian saw the lucky gold coin emit a hazy glow. One of the candles representing Mr. Fool darkened, and the other took on a brass hue.
Immediately after, the darkness and brass candlelight entangled with the half-finished brass charm.
The brass charm emitted a blinding light, and Lumian couldn't help but close his eyes.
By the time he adjusted and opened his eyes, the brass charm had vanished. The soil, rocks, and tree roots in front of the black ancient tomb surged, forming a tombstone-like object.
Ancient Feysac words appeared on the tombstone one after another:
"All living beings are equal before the law. Even Angels can be killed by ordinary people.
"Lost items are regarded as abandonment.
"Anything can be done during the Dream Festival, but not killing or rape.
"Murderers shall die.

"Rapists shall die.
"..."
What... *What pathway's power is this?* It resembles the Arbiter pathway... Killing isn't allowed for the next Dream Festival? Even an Angel can be harmed by me? Lumian hadn't expected Madam Magician's preparations.
He swiftly packed his belongings and planned to leave the area.
Finally, Lumian had an idea when he saw the "tombstone."
With a smile, he retrieved a card from his Traveler's Bag, bent down, and placed it on the ground beneath the tombstone.
It was a tarot card depicting a man in green holding a wand against attacking wands at the foot of a mountain.
Minor Arcana card, Seven of Wands!
Lumian didn't know if the tarot cards representing him could remain in the dream or in front of the tombstone. He simply wanted to give it a try. After all, he hadn't done so since becoming a member of the Tarot Club.
...
Upon returning to the real world, Lumian reached into his Traveler's Bag and examined it.
As expected, the half-finished brass charm had vanished, as had the Minor Arcana card, the Seven of Wands.
The rules of the special dream are indeed a little different... Lumian nodded thoughtfully and returned the lucky gold coin to Ludwig at the Brieu Motel.
Then, Lumian stepped onto the street. In the darkness, he passed Camus, Rhea, Lugano, and the others, who were busy rescuing and treating people, and arrived at Saint-Sien Cathedral.
All the candles in the cathedral had been lit, but only Padre Cali was present.
Dressed in a white robe adorned with golden threads, he knelt before the altar and the Sacred Emblem, his head bowed in anguish.
Lumian walked in step by step and took a seat in the front row. He watched Padre Cali quietly without disturbing him.

Chapter 699: Who is to Blame?

The smoke and dust caused by the meteorite had mostly dissipated, and the commotion on the street had gradually subsided. The injured had largely escaped danger thanks to swift treatment, but some still perished, eliciting occasional cries of anguish.

Inside Saint-Sien Cathedral, Padre Cali completed his penance. He stood and turned to face Lumian, who sat silently in the front pew, observing him.

Lumian chuckled and asked casually, "Is repentance still of any use?"

Without waiting for a response, he added habitually, "You must know your fate is sealed. You won't survive more than a few days."

Paleness showed through Padre Cali's dark-brown complexion as he calmly replied, "If repentance worked, it wouldn't be true repentance."

This statement seemed to bring him a measure of peace.

"I repented because I wanted to, not to bargain for understanding or redemption. Looking back, I have indeed made many mistakes. I yearned for higher status and the approval of you Northerners. That desire blinded me, and I succumbed to the Demon's temptations."

Lumian scoffed upon hearing this.

"Is that truly the case? Did desire actually cloud your judgment?"

Noting the padre's bewildered expression, Lumian leaned back and gazed up at the Sun Sacred Emblem.

"Did your ambition for prestige and recognition from Northerners force you to collaborate with Twanaku, compel you to become a Wraith as an Eternal Blazing Sun padre, make you receptive to the Demon's allure, or drive you to exploit those boys? No, you chose this path of your own volition."

Padre Cali's lips quivered as if to object, but he couldn't find the words.

Lumian smiled and continued, "Many in this world still crave elevated status and the recognition of certain groups. Most of them simply work hard to contribute and combat evil with all their strength. They never consort with Demons, hoping to attain their goals through righteous means. Even in the face of repeated failure, they don't descend into the abyss.

"They share the same desires, yet they maintain self-control while you could not. Desire didn't cloud your mind—your mind chose depravity."

Padre Cali fell silent, at a loss for words.

Lumian sighed with a smile.
"A relative once told me, 'Intense desire fuels human progress, but it's also the demon that drags humans into the abyss. Good or bad, light or darkness—it all hinges on us, on that single thought in a pivotal moment.'"
His face growing ever paler, Padre Cali lowered his head and rasped, "I have sinned..."
Lumian pressed a hand to his chest, his expression settling.
He looked at Padre Cali and laughed self-deprecatingly.
"I too have strong desires. Everyone does. If harboring intense desire is a sin, then you are a sinner, and so am I. We are all guilty."
Padre Cali's expression froze momentarily before he slowly turned around.
Kneeling once more before the altar, he gazed up at the immense Sun Sacred Emblem and spoke in a deep voice, "You are innocent. Desire itself is not sinful, but I am a true sinner."
He bowed his head as his body gradually became ethereal and transparent.
Thus, Padre Cali manifested as a Wraith before the Sacred Emblem.
An icy, sinister aura emanated from him, triggering a reaction from the emblem and altar.
The entire cathedral trembled slightly. A brilliant, sunlight-
like radiance seeped from the altar, emblem, stained glass, and religious murals, rapidly converging at the domed ceiling.
A dazzling golden pillar of light, accompanied by a hymnal voice, descended upon Padre Cali.
The Wraith-form padre trembled faintly but did not evade.
Under the searing holy light, his body disintegrated into ashes.
Lumian observed this scene expressionlessly, feeling neither joy nor sorrow.
As the dome's holy glow dissipated, leaving only candlelight illuminating the cathedral, Lumian remained seated in the front pew, quietly contemplating the spot where Padre Cali had been purified.
After an indeterminate span, Camus and Rhea entered the cathedral, having finished their disaster relief efforts.
Camus sighed in relief upon seeing Louis Berry in the front row.
He smiled and said, "We still lack composure, prone to panic when calamity strikes. We were so focused on aiding the injured and trapped that we never anticipated a detestable man like Padre Cali suddenly going mad and trying to drag others down with him. It's fortunate you were here."

Rhea surveyed the surroundings and asked, "Where is Padre Cali?"
Lumian stared ahead at the altar and replied plainly, "After repenting, he utilized the cathedral's accumulated spirituality and the Sacred Emblem's unique properties to purify himself."
Rhea fell silent. After a few seconds, she spread her arms and proclaimed, "Praise the Sun!"
She then took a seat in the front pew on the opposite side, clasped her hands, bowed her head, and prayed fervently.
For a moment, Camus was unsure whether to sit or remain standing.
Lumian turned to him. "Have you recovered Reaza's Beyonder characteristic?"
Camus paused before responding, "Yes."
"And Maslow's?" Lumian shifted his gaze back to the Sacred Emblem.
"Its whereabouts are unknown," Camus replied.
Lumian stated calmly, "It should be in the meteorite impact zone."
Camus was taken aback. "Was the meteorite meant to claim most of the deceased? Is the Dream Festival's power truly that immense?"
"More potent than you realize," Lumian replied, as if discussing the next day's weather. "Reaza and Maslow belong to the Numinous Episcopate's Royal faction. Admiral Querarill is aware of their identities and that Reaza came to Tizamo to fulfill a mission assigned by the Royal faction's superiors."
Camus's expression shifted as he exhaled slowly.
"Even without you mentioning this, I wouldn't have harbored any ill will towards Captain Reaza. He did save me on multiple occasions, and this time, he didn't overtly betray me but rather the patrol team. My sense of belonging to the team isn't that strong.
"Now, I'm just relieved he's not a traitor."
Lumian smiled provocatively and said, "It benefits you as well. Port Pylos's patrol team now has a vacant vice-captain position, and your rival is already dead."
Camus didn't rise to the bait, smiling wryly instead.
"I plan to leave Matani.
"Thanks to your generosity, I've nearly saved enough to advance to Sequence 6. It's safer and simpler to return to my family and contact the main branch than to search the outside world.
"The patrol team is a small organization, after all. Sequence 6 is the limit. To reach Sequence 5, I'd need to forge close ties with the Numinous Episcopate, Rose School of Thought, Intis Bureau 8, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, or the Church of Earth Mother, or become Admiral Querarill's trusted aide. Given my Castiya

surname, the choice is clear."
If the Castiya royal family truly accepts you, your potential would be far greater... Lumian chuckled and said, "I thought you were leaving this place of sorrow due to a failed romance."
Camus abruptly choked on his saliva and coughed several times.
After Rhea concluded her prayers, she departed the cathedral with Camus.
Lumian lingered in the front pew, savoring the solitude.
After a while, Amandina appeared at the entrance, clad in black hunting attire.
"Why are you alone here?" the girl muttered, her gaze darting about as if searching for something.
"Why have you come?" Lumian asked nonchalantly.
Amandina sat beside him and chuckled.
"I wanted to see if Robert would come looking for the dying Padre Cali, but surprisingly, you're the only one here."
"Padre Cali purified himself. I doubt Robert has been here," Lumian answered truthfully.
"Is that so..." Amandina felt a pang of disappointment. "If he had really come to confront Padre Cali, it would mean he still is a man..."
Lumian remained silent.
Amandina faced the altar and Sacred Emblem, offering a brief prayer.
Her task complete, she glanced around eagerly and asked, "Will there be another Dream Festival next year?"
"Yes." Lumian didn't hide anything.
Joy instantly lit up Amandina's features.
"Is that black ancient tomb still there? Can I gain superpowers by touching it again?"
"Of course," Lumian turned to her, smiling. "But the outsiders participating in next year's Dream Festival will be even stronger and more terrifying, surpassing the evil cloth doll, crystal skull, and human skin man you encountered."
Amandina's expression fell.
"Really? In that case, I'll find an excuse to stay in Port Pylos during next year's festival and bring my parents along."
"Have you returned to Palm Manor?" Lumian inquired.
Amandina sighed and smiled.
"I went back briefly. Not wanting to disrupt their facade of love, I left again."
She paused, eyes sparkling with curiosity.
"Besides touching the black tomb, are there other ways for me to advance my Sequence?"

"You can buy formulas and drink potions to progress along one of three paths—Sleepless, Corpse Collector, or Warrior," Lumian divulged the relevant mystical knowledge without reservation. After some thought, he added, "Also, it wasn't the black tomb that granted you superpowers. It was that figure..."

Lumian was suddenly perplexed.

What was the connection between Amandina, Robert, and the Underworld Daoist?

Typically, boons were bestowed upon believers by deities or angels, but Amandina and Robert had no faith in the Underworld Daoist. They weren't even aware of His existence.

Considering the conventions of various secret organizations and the customs Franca occasionally mentioned, Amandina should have addressed the Underworld Daoist as "Teacher"!

Chapter 700: Return

In the special dream, Amandina mentioned that the figure, known as the Underworld Daoist, had nodded at her... "Armored Shadow" Chen Tu is suspected to be related to the Underworld Daoist... Franca is accumulating gold to create a golden body for Chen Tu to obtain more information... Lumian's mind raced with these thoughts.

He turned to Amandina with a smile.

"You won't only encounter that figure during the Dream Festival."

"It's possible normally?" Amandina asked, surprised.

What kind of smarts do you have... Lumian inwardly criticized, shaking his head and smiling.

"What I mean is, it's not just in Tizamo where you can encounter that figure on a specific date."

Amandina pondered for a few moments before grasping the underlying meaning behind Louis Berry's words.

"Have you seen that figure elsewhere?

"I thought you couldn't see him and could only observe through me?"

Thankfully, you're not that dense... Lumian retrieved the golden mask from his Traveler's Bag.

"I could see after putting this on."

Without waiting for Amandina's response, Lumian added with a smile, "I did encounter that figure elsewhere."

He used "encounter" instead of "meeting" to ensure his statement couldn't be more truthful.

He wanted to say, "I even know His name," but didn't feel like explaining to Amandina why he used the pronoun "He" to address the Underworld Daoist respectfully.

Amandina's expression turned excited. "Where?"

"In Trier," Lumian replied honestly.

This was the information he wanted the other party to know.

"Trier..." Amandina felt a mix of captivation and fear.

As an Intisian born and raised on the Southern Continent, she had heard countless rumors about the Capital of Joy and understood its vibrancy and prosperity. Trier had nearly become her dream paradise, but the furthest she had ventured was Port Pylos, never leaving Matani. If given the chance to visit Trier, fear was her initial reaction.

After all, she was still a girl under 18.

Lumian continued candidly, "In the future, I know someone who might interact with that figure. I hope you can provide her with some assistance—the non-combat kind.

"To that end, I can take you to Trier and help you enter the area where the figure might appear. I can also provide some protection. "How about it? Do you want to strike such a deal?"
"I-I..." Amandina hesitated, instinctively seeking an excuse. "My parents won't allow me to leave Matani for Trier now. At the very least, I have to wait until I get a chance to attend university there."
Lumian found it amusing and remarked, "I'm not asking you to permanently relocate to Trier. You can go on Saturday and return on Sunday."
"Huh?" Amandina was taken aback.
She had imagined a long-distance voyage, hiking through mountains and wading across rivers, forever bidding farewell to her home.
Lumian arched an eyebrow.
"It's not like I haven't teleported you in the dream before."
"B-but isn't that just a small area?" Amandina's eyes lit up. "Can you really teleport directly from Matani to Trier?"
Lumian nodded slightly.
"Yes, I might need to make a transit once or twice along the way, but it will still allow you to reach Trier quickly."
"Quickly..." Amandina's interest was piqued. She yearned to experience such wonders.
However, she didn't make a decision immediately.
Lumian didn't rush her.
"No need to decide right away. Meeting that figure again is actually quite dangerous. You should first truly come into contact with Matani's mysticism circle and learn the basics about Beyonders from Rhea. Only then should you consider accepting this deal. It might take three months, half a year, or even a year."
Amandina breathed a sigh of relief. "Understood."
Curious, she asked, "Is your friend a woman?"
He had used the pronoun "she."
In our hearts and minds, she has always been one. As for how she identifies, sometimes yes, sometimes no... Lumian inwardly criticized Franca and nodded slightly.
"Yes."
Amandina asked excitedly, "Your lover?"
Lumian chuckled.
"Of course not. Why do you always fixate on such matters?"
As Lumian spoke, he retrieved a post-it note and fountain pen from his Traveler's Bag. He scribbled a few lines and handed them to Amandina.
Amandina took it and carefully read it under the cathedral's candlelight:

"A creature wandering above the world, the penitent who awakens from the flames of pain, a messenger that belongs solely to Lumian Lee."
"What's this?" Amandina was bewildered.
"My messenger. Set up a ritual once you've made up your mind. Use this incantation to summon my messenger and inform me of your decision," Lumian explained simply.
Amandina grew increasingly perplexed.
"What ritual? What summoning? This isn't a conventional messenger?"
Lumian raised his eyebrows again.
"Have you never heard of a messenger in the mysticism domain? Don't you know about summoning rituals?"
Amandina smiled sheepishly and said, "I came into contact with superpowers last year and gathered some information about the pathways of the divine through Robert and a few mysticism enthusiasts. I know about rituals, but I'm not sure about the details."
Then, her eyes lit up.
"You'll teach me, won't you? Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to summon your messenger.
"Also, is your real name not Louis Berry, but Lumian Lee?
"Y-you took a pen and paper from that coin bag. You also took your previous items from there. What kind of mystical item is this?
"..."
Lumian couldn't help but glance up at the golden spherical dome.
...
The following morning, Lumian left the Brieu Motel with Ludwig and Lugano. They passed through streets still strewn with ruins and arrived at Bunia's café.
The owner, Bunia, maintained his usual shyness and politely inquired about their needs.
Lumian ordered three cups of Cosa coffee and three servings of Matani's specialty breakfast, Ocapa.
Ocapa was made from rice, chicken, eggs, potatoes, and common local spices wrapped in leaves from the Ocapa trees. It was filling and fragrant, and one couldn't stop eating once they started.
Lumian gazed at the spread of Ocapa, picked up his cutlery, and scooped a spoonful into his mouth.
The fragrance of the leaves, the salted egg yolk, the weightiness of the rice, the tenderness of the chicken, the softness of the potatoes, and the strange rich aroma combined to create a unique texture.
As Lumian ate, he casually surveyed the pedestrians and café

patrons on the street.
After the sorrow and fear of the previous night, they had become gentle again, no longer revealing excessive emotions. When they spoke to others, they always had a faint smile on their faces.
After Ludwig finished his second meal of the morning, Lumian found a secluded corner, changed into winter clothes, and disappeared from Tizamo with him and Lugano.
This time, Lumian refrained from teleporting directly to Franca, as Lugano, Ludwig, and the two Demonesses were unfamiliar with each other.
Lumian chose the rarely used entrance to Underground Trier in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. The trio swiftly outlined themselves on the steel steps.
Upon returning to the surface, Lumian spotted a few college students carrying carbide lamps and lanterns. They jested as they passed by the trio and entered Underground Trier.
As he turned onto the nearest main street, the first thing Lumian saw was a scantily clad man in chains. He crawled slowly along the street in a dog-like manner. If anyone dared to glance at him, he would glare back and bark twice.
In the next moment, the street artists on the corner played a rhythmic melody. Passersby more or less danced with relaxed and satisfied smiles on their faces. The man acting as a dog and trembling in the cold wind also raised his hind leg.
This was very different from the streets in the market district.
Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative was renowned for its numerous universities.
Lumian averted his gaze from the pedestrians' smiles and led Lugano and Ludwig to Anthony's nearby rented house.
It was on the fourth floor, near the end of the corridor.
Knock! Knock! Knock! Lumian knocked on the door without hesitation.
Soon, he saw Anthony, who was dressed differently from before.
In a white shirt, light gray cashmere sweater, black tweed coat, dark-red bow tie, gold-rimmed glasses, and a light-
yellow wig, his beard was cleanly shaven, and his face was no longer greasy. The black grime in his pores was gone. He had the air of a successful member of high society.
"Are you in a relationship?" Lumian jested.
Anthony replied with a smile, "I'm attending a banquet hosted by the Trier Psychiatrist Guild today."
This was a necessary prerequisite for completing Madam Justice's mission.
Lumian entered the room and asked casually, "Have you obtained

a psychiatrist license?"
Anthony nodded.
"I acquired a genuine identity and educational background. During the interview, I successfully 'convinced' the examiner."
"A genuine identity? Where's its original owner?" Lumian asked thoughtfully.
Anthony glanced at Lugano and Ludwig but didn't directly answer Lumian's question.
"What can I do for you?"
Lumian understood Anthony's meaning and temporarily abandoned the question. He briefly mentioned the Dream Festival's situation and the aftereffects of Lugano losing his arm in the dream.
He didn't mention how Lugano had lost his arm.
Anthony listened attentively and looked at Lugano.
"Such hysteria is easily resolved. Do you need a faster solution, or do you want it to be slower and gentler?"
Lugano replied without hesitation, "The faster one."
He had lost control of his right forearm!
Anthony's gaze shifted to Lugano's left side, furrowing his brow.
Lugano subconsciously turned to his left and followed suit.
At that moment, Anthony produced a dagger from nowhere and thrust it at Lugano's right forearm.
Lugano swiftly retracted his hand and blurted out, "What are you doing!?"
Anthony sheathed his dagger and replied calmly, "The treatment is over."
"Huh?" Lugano looked at his right hand in confusion and realized that it had "retracted" to his chest without being impeded.
Lumian chuckled and said to Lugano, "Keep an eye on Ludwig. Remember to prepare food for him."
Without waiting for Lugano's response, Lumian turned to Anthony. "Let's go find Franca and Jenna now."
Anthony glanced at Lumian and adjusted the gold-rimmed glasses he was unaccustomed to. "Alright."

Chapter 701: The Cheerful Franca

In Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Apartment 702, 9 Rue Orosai.

Franca, dressed in a camel-colored cashmere coat, shivered and said to Lumian, "As soon as I have the money, I'm definitely renting a villa with underfloor heating!"

The concept of underfloor heating was proposed by Emperor Roselle. By laying metal pipes in the house during construction, boiling water could flow through them, providing summer-like warmth in confined spaces and keeping out the cold weather.

This was a must-have amenity for Trier's current upscale residences.

"Why would a Demoness like you be afraid of the cold?" Lumian scoffed.

He glanced at Jenna and noticed she was wearing a black cotton dress and dark makeup, as if portraying a Witch or Vampire in the little details of her daily life.

"I'm not a Pyromaniac. A Demoness's black flames have no temperature!" Franca retorted with a smile.

Lumian casually settled onto the divan.

"Aren't Demonesses skilled with ice? Don't they have resistance to frost and cold?"

Franca reclined in her recliner, pulled up a cashmere blanket, and chuckled.

"I admit my performance just now was a little exaggerated, but Trier's winters really are cold. It's mainly because it's so humid. It's like being soaked in a semi-frozen lake."

After the small talk, Franca sighed and said, "I've already obtained more information about Moran Avigny and the corresponding security detail. We can put the capture plan on the agenda. And you, my friend, are about to participate in the Dream Festival. Talk about a scheduling conflict."

Lumian's expression remained unchanged as he replied, "The Dream Festival is over."

"Huh?" Franca and Jenna were taken aback.

Already?

Lumian recounted everything that had transpired during the Dream Festival, including Madam Magician's subsequent explanation.

Of course, as the name Farbauti couldn't be pronounced in any language, Lumian referred to it as the Devil Monarch and replaced Naboredisley with "the Demon with a long name."

Franca's breathing quickened upon hearing that Lumian had

donned a golden mask and spotted the suspected Underworld Daoist. Lumian's description of the Underworld Daoist's attire made her eyes light up like sunlight dancing on a lake.
Thankfully, her self-control was impressive. She endured until Lumian finished explaining the entire situation before asking anxiously, "Will there be another Dream Festival next year?"
"You want to participate in next year's Dream Festival and come into direct contact with the Underworld Daoist?" Lumian could guess Franca's thoughts.
Franca nodded emphatically.
"I believe that if the Underworld Daoist can bestow the Evernight pathway's power on Amandina, I, uh, a Demoness, shouldn't have any issues either. I wouldn't mind taking Him as my master!
"Don't worry. As long as I remain lucid, I won't unleash my bestial instincts during the Dream Festival."
She teased herself.
Originally, you wanted to say that you're from the same homeland and not a Demoness, right? Lumian chuckled and said, "It's not impossible, but you have to become an Angel first."
"..." Franca fell silent.
Jenna pondered and said, "There's something I don't understand. Isn't it the case that after obtaining the ability to stay lucid in the special dream, the corresponding dream projection will gradually dissipate? Why didn't Hisoka's?"
Lumian had already considered this question.
"Perhaps this is one of the reasons Hisoka had to leave Tizamo.
"The ability to stay lucid in the special dream shouldn't be permanent. Once you leave Tizamo, it will gradually fade. Therefore, Hisoka not only had to leave Tizamo, but also had to return two to three times a year for at least a week each time to maintain the existence of the dream projection."
After discussing the Dream Festival, Franca briefly recounted the information she had obtained from 007 the previous night.
"Moran Avigny's family has a long history. Members span the military, political, artistic, and business worlds. Combined with the information Madam Judgment gave us, I suspect this is a branch of the Tamara family. Their dark-gray eyes are one of the defining characteristics of the Tamara bloodline!
"Of course, not everyone with dark-gray eyes belongs to the Tamara family. It's more that members of the family are likely to have dark-gray eyes.
"Based on the close connection between a large branch of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect, it's very likely that Demoness of Black Clarice also shares the Tamara family's

bloodline.
"Following my hypothesis, the Demoness of Black might be a mixed-blood descendant of the Sauron family who pledged allegiance to the Demoness Sect and the Tamara family."
This was the only explanation for Demoness of Black Clarice's reaction when she heard about the Sauron family. It was also the only explanation for her indulging Browns Sauron!
Lumian didn't interrupt as Franca continued, "We need to face not only Moran Avigny but also the hidden Tamara family and the Mirror People faction. Moran Avigny might possess powerful Beyonder powers himself. Furthermore, Bureau 8, Purifiers, and Machinery Hivemind rotate daily, with a regular Beyonder team providing protection.
"What my friend means is that if we're unafraid of sacrifice, there's still a chance of assassinating Moran Avigny. However, capturing him alive or channeling his spirit is very difficult and dangerous."
What 007 truly meant was that the Purifiers wouldn't go easy on us or provide overt assistance. However, if Moran Avigny's true nature as a Mirror Person is exposed after his death, 007 would find a way to allow us—the captured assassins—an opportunity to escape, just like when Jenna killed Hugues Artois. However, if we didn't want to obtain more information about the Mirror People through Moran Avigny, wouldn't it be better to inform the authorities and let them handle the arrest? Lumian pondered for a moment and said to Franca, "Let's not rush into a plan. We'll discuss it tomorrow."
"Why wait until tomorrow?" Franca asked, holding the stack of papers 007 had given her.
Lumian chuckled.
"After I find a safe place to complete my advancement and become a Fate Appropriator, perhaps a special, mixed ability related to fate will appear. That might help us obtain new ideas and come up with more effective solutions."
In the current four-person team, it was no secret that Lumian possessed the power of the Inevitability pathway.
Franca blurted out in surprise, "You can obtain a new boon so quickly?"
"Didn't I just mention it?" Lumian smiled. "I culled nearly 20 Sequence 6 and Sequence 5 bestowed in one go, significantly digesting the potion."
Franca pursed her lips and signaled to Lumian with her eyes: Look, look into my eyes! They're filled with jealousy!
Lumian turned to Anthony and asked, "What did you mean by

genuine identity?"
Anthony, who had been listening quietly and was on the verge of being forgotten, explained simply, "Actually, it was a hint from Madam Justice. That identity is very strange. His background, education, and experiences are all real, but there's actually no such person. And the people who might expose this are either long dead or out of town, the kind who won't return for years."
Franca made a judgment based on her experience. "It seems it was meticulously crafted years in advance as a disguise."
Since they weren't discussing a plan to deal with Moran Avigny today, Anthony didn't stay long. He had to prepare for tonight's banquet.
"Where do you plan to advance to Fate Appropriator?" Jenna asked Lumian. "The sacrificial square in the catacombs?"
It belonged to two orthodox gods and could protect advancers from additional interference.
"I'm afraid I'll trigger a taboo and be purified by sunlight," Lumian dismissed the suggestion with amusement. "Advancing to Conspirer is different from advancing to Fate Appropriator."
One belonged to the pathways of the divine, while the other belonged to an evil god's domain!
Lumian had already decided on a location to advance.
It was the Nation of the Evernight!
Termiboros's well-behaved nature kept Lumian concerned that He was waiting for an opportunity to stir up trouble. And as a Fate Appropriator began to involve core abilities in the Inevitability domain, it was very likely that Termiboros would tamper at this Sequence.
Therefore, Lumian had to be cautious. He planned to advance in a safe place that could eliminate many external influences.
Among them, the Nation of the Evernight was the best choice. Furthermore, Lumian had planned to contact Hela in the next two days to share information about the Underworld Daoist and the Dream Festival.
Franca looked at Lumian in enlightenment. "You want to advance at our mysticism gathering?"
"Yes." Lumian nodded slightly.
Franca, who was in a good mood, took the initiative to help. "I'll help you write the letter!"
After she entered the bedroom and closed the door, Lumian looked at Jenna and said, "You're very quiet today."
Jenna smiled. "An excellent theater actress must know how to act like a lady."
Lumian glanced at Franca's door.

"Madame Red Boots seems to be in high spirits today. She's cracking jokes left and right."
"It's true she's been in a good mood recently," Jenna replied truthfully.
Lumian nodded thoughtfully and didn't probe further.
Jenna's lips curled into a smile. "Why don't you keep asking?"
Lumian leaned back on the sofa and laughed self-deprecatingly.
"My sister once taught me that there's no need to inquire too deeply about certain matters. If I know too much, I might regret it. I might even have to face problems I'm unwilling to face."
Jenna listened attentively, placed her hand on her cheek, and asked with a smile, "What are you afraid of?"
Lumian strategically took a sip of black tea and said, "It's not fear; it's respect."
Jenna gazed at him and suddenly laughed.
She didn't press further and chatted with Lumian about the details of Tizamo.
Before long, Franca opened the door and exclaimed with a smile, "It's on for tonight!"
...
At 10 p.m., in the ancient and dilapidated palace of the Nation of the Evernight, Lumian and Franca swiftly materialized, and Hela was already waiting.

Chapter 702: Fate Appropriator

Before Lumian had a chance to say anything, Franca eagerly recounted the events involving the Underworld Daoist during the Dream Festival.

She said excitedly, "The interaction between our two worlds is even more intricate than I had imagined!"

"Who would have thought there was another point of interaction beyond the Samaritan Women's Spring, and it's all tied to that mysterious illusory river."

Silently, Franca mused, It's a shame we still haven't located the man believed to be from our world who was seen on the fourth level of the catacombs... Seriously, what's taking 007, no—the Eternal Blazing Sun Church so long? They haven't even tracked down the traitor who worked with April Fool's...

Once Franca had finished speaking, Lumian provided a concise explanation of the origins of the black ancient tomb and the ancient corpse.

Hela, still in her black widow attire, listened intently, gently nodding her head.

"It's now evident that the illusory river isn't a reference to the River Styx. It must be something far more significant than that."

"Absolutely." Lumian wasn't caught off guard by Hela's statement. "The black ancient tomb doesn't just embody the power of the Death pathway; it also represents the Evernight and Warrior pathways."

In the current world, all the legends surrounding the River Styx were connected to death.

Lumian speculated that this might involve beings such as the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, the Mother Tree of Desire, and the Great Mother, who held multiple thrones linked to various pathways.

Hela glanced at Franca, falling silent for a moment before speaking.

"If the Armored Shadow is right, the Underworld Daoist is in a precarious state. If you intend to interact with Him, you must exercise extreme caution and ensure you have an escape route from the corresponding area."

The Armored Shadow had described the Underworld Daoist as having "sacrificed himself to enter the river," implying the sacrifice of one's physical form or life.

"I understand." Franca let out a sigh. "I'll give this matter more thought once I reach Sequence 5."

As she sighed, a smug thought crossed her mind, The Pleasure

potion has been largely digested lately. Even without additional opportunities, I can start preparing for the Demoness of Affliction's advancement ritual within two to three months... I need to begin gathering the necessary potion ingredients now...
I can't mention it, I mustn't mention it—I can't let Lumian know. Bragging would make me seem crass and disrespectful to Jenna...
Lumian's curious gaze alternated between Hela and Franca a couple of times.
He sensed that Madame Hela had something crucial to tell Franca but refrained from doing so.
It was rare for Lumian to perceive Madame Hela as having something on her mind. Her glance at Franca and few seconds of silence gave him the impression of hesitancy.
Regrettably, Franca often has a carefree nature and doesn't pay much attention to details. Otherwise, she might be able to extract some information from her through direct questioning... Lumian's mind raced, and he concluded that if Madame Hela chose not to say anything at this point, she must have her reasons. Thus, he suppressed his curiosity and gestured towards the front of the dilapidated palace.
"I'll get the ritual ready."
"Sounds good," Franca responded with enthusiasm.
While she had witnessed Lumian acquire Ascetic powers, that had taken place in Fourth Epoch Trier. A myriad of dangers had intertwined, causing her to shudder with fear. She had to maintain constant vigilance of her surroundings, unable to "appreciate" the situation with the same level of ease as she could now.
After a moment of contemplation, Lumian retrieved a metal canister from a hidden pocket and tossed it to Franca.
"If things start going poorly for me later on, forcefully break through the wall of spirituality and throw this in front of me or on me."
"Should I unscrew the cap for you?" Franca asked, a smile playing on her lips.
"What do you think?" Lumian arched an eyebrow.
"Naturally," Franca replied, her smile unwavering. "I'm just trying to lighten the mood. I want you to feel at ease."
"I appreciate it!" Lumian turned and made his way to the massive stone chair in the depths of the ancient palace.
His intuition suggested that the huge, mottled stone chair might have a connection to Mr. Fool.
This would enable him to draw Mr. Fool's attention during the impending ritual.

As Franca and Hela watched Lumian arrange the corresponding items on the stone chair, setting it up as an altar and placing a Loen gold pound reverently in front of the grayish-white candle symbolizing the deity, Hela calmly remarked, "Don't be concerned about not receiving a response. The secrets will remain secret, while the rest will be revealed."

Lumian felt himself relax as he consecrated the ritual silver dagger, erecting a wall of spirituality.

The voices of Franca and Hela faded into the background, as if emanating from a great distance.

Rather than rushing into the ritual, Lumian lowered his voice and proactively provoked Termiboros.

"I'm about to extract your power once more. Any thoughts on the matter?"

He aimed to enrage Termiboros to a certain degree. Only then might Termiboros inadvertently expose any concealed issues in His response, allowing Lumian to discern whether this Inevitability Angel was secretly plotting something.

The sooner he uncovered it, the sooner he could address it and find a resolution!

Termiboros's imposing voice resonated.

"The further you venture, the closer you draw to the end. This is an inevitability—irreversible."

"Is that how you console yourself?" Lumian scoffed at Termiboros's enigmatic behavior.

Termiboros's voice reverberated within Lumian's body.

"Boons bring the recipient closer to the bestower. You may believe you're extracting my power, but in truth, you're steadily aligning your fate with mine, becoming more and more like me.

"This grants me glimpses through your eyes and your fate.

"You and I are merely bugs ensnared by fate. Apart from the greatest of existences, all living beings share this commonality.

"In the near future, you will come to understand: "Death is the end of all things, and madness is an eternal melody."

That's essentially the same as saying nothing... Is Termiboros implying that I will face a setback in the near future? Lumian chuckled and said, "Are you deliberately saying this to make me obtain the power of a Fate Appropriator while burdened with worry and fear, hoping I'll die here?

"Don't concern yourself. Death and madness won't deter me."

Without awaiting Termiboros's reply, Lumian fixed his gaze upon the candle flame and recited in a deep, resonant voice, "Power of Inevitability!

"You are the past, the present, and the future;

"You are the cause, the effect, and the process;
"..."
As the ritual progressed, Franca and Hela bore witness to the transformation of all the items on the altar. Stones softened, candles expanded, and the ground decayed into a swamp. Countless strange insects loomed in the void.
The darkness outside the dilapidated palace intensified. A silver-black liquid flowed from Lumian's chest, enveloping him like corrupted mercury.
Lumian writhed in agony. Throughout this process, his body alternated between contortion and normalcy, occasionally assuming postures that defied human anatomy. It was as though he were boneless, his skin and flesh infused with mercury.
Franca was startled and experienced an inexplicable, illusory pain.
Amidst the excruciating and familiar pain, Lumian caught sight of Aurore.
Aurore, with her thick, long blond hair, was attempting the Soul Summoning Spell!
Lumian stepped forward and intervened, stopping Aurore.
Just as he rejoiced in the belief that the problem had been nipped in the bud and Aurore wouldn't fracture into the evil personality of Roche Louise Sanson, he was horrified to discover that Aurore's body had undergone a drastic transformation. In a bloody state, she had expanded into a monster with three heads and six arms, sitting cross-legged.
Lumian witnessed Aurore seeking assistance from Hela. Reluctantly, he offered his help, preventing his sister from forgetting this matter. However, when Hela arrived, Aurore had already transformed into a colossal three-headed, six-armed monster, despite the final ritual not having been performed.
Aurore, at various stages of life, appeared before Lumian. They were on the verge of making pivotal choices.
Lumian desperately tried to alter the Aurores' fates and prevent them from descending into the abyss. However, each time, although he managed to redirect fate to another tributary, Aurore's spirit and flesh ultimately crumbled, transforming her into a three-headed, six-armed monster.
Is this inevitability? Is this an irreversible outcome? Lumian's eyes turned bloodshot as he made increasingly futile efforts.
At that instant, he caught a whiff of an elegant and sweet scent, and a soothing chant echoed in his ears.
Lumian quickly regained his senses and clarity of mind.
The Aurores before him abruptly vanished, leaving only the quietly burning candle flames.

Instinctively, Lumian glanced behind him and realized that Franca and Hela were nearby. The wall of spirituality had been shattered.
Simultaneously, Franca observed the flickering silver and iron-black colors in Lumian's eyes before they merged and settled into a silvery-black hue.
Lumian exhaled, recognizing that he had evaded danger and successfully acquired the power of a Fate Appropriator.
Yet, a profound sense of frustration and disappointment lingered within him.
What he had just experienced in the illusion seemed to foretell the ultimate outcome of his desire to resurrect Aurore.
After ten to twenty seconds, Lumian finally broke free from those emotions and regained his determination.
How could anyone give up without even trying!
Franca breathed a sigh of relief, screwed the cap back on, and asked with a smile, "How did it go? Any new abilities?"
You really don't consider yourself an outsider. How can you nonchalantly inquire about someone's new Beyonder powers? Lumian silently criticized Franca as he meticulously observed his transformation.
His eyes, which had just returned to normal, once again turned silvery-black, reflecting the images of Franca and Hela.
Then, he perceived the mercury-colored illusory river that corresponded to the two ladies. He saw the sparkling light representing their past and present river trunks and the numerous tributaries that had branched off from the present.
The illusory river slowly advanced, devouring all the tributaries, leaving only one behind, transforming it into the main bulk. The main bulk continued to split into new tributaries...
Lumian noticed that one of the tributaries, regardless of whether it belonged to Franca or Hela, emitted a faint black hue.

Chapter 703: Fused Ability

Black... When it comes to luck, this color signifies they'll face a deadly calamity... If the hue isn't dense, could it mean the calamity is potentially fatal but avoidable—that there's a chance of overcoming it? Yes, I'll watch others going forward. I might spot dense black. Maybe that implies if the corresponding tributary is selected, a deadly fate is sealed... Lumian continued observing Franca and Hela's fates, forming a related hypothesis.

Since the tributaries constantly shifted, Lumian couldn't fully grasp a target's future fate. He could only catch glimpses of a few possibilities. The black "mark" let him pinpoint the critical junctures.

This wasn't covered in the mystical knowledge accompanying a Fate Appropriator's power. Lumian strongly suspected that once Luck Observation evolved into Fate Observation, it could merge with a Reaper's Weakness Investigation to create this unique ability.

It was like exposing a target's physical and spiritual weak points—the tributary leading to their demise!

As I suspected, the Hunter and Inevitability pathways' visual abilities have combined... Lumian used the chance to examine Hela and Franca's fate rivers, realizing he could perceive fragments of their past and present destinies, similar to when he used Fallen Mercury to discern others' fates.

The difference now was that he could see it directly, without extending his spirituality. With the right abilities, he could touch the ethereal river that shimmered with mercury-like ripples, woven from intricate symbols.

Put another way, he could "see" part of a target's fate without their awareness.

Naturally, compared to touching the corresponding fate river through abilities, there were clear limits to relying on eyesight. Most life scenes in the mercury river were quite hazy in such cases. The nearer to the present, the sharper they became. Likewise, the less they involved high-level matters, the clearer they appeared.

Franca and Hela's life scenes presented a vivid, striking contrast in this regard.

Past and present fragments manifesting in Hela's fate river's mercury ripples seemed veiled in fog, while others appeared cloaked in night, making them indiscernible. Only a handful could be perceived. Franca's was far clearer. Especially in the last week or two, Lumian could see everything except scenes with high-level

entities like the Evernight Nation, Madam Judgment, and the Demoness of Black.
During his exploratory observation, Lumian was abruptly startled.
After a few seconds, he looked away, unsettled.
"What's the matter?" Franca inquired, curious and concerned. "If you prefer not to disclose your specific abilities, that's fine."
Only then did she realize she had been too eager to ask about the Fate Appropriator's situation and potential abilities in front of Madame Hela.
Lumian couldn't help swallowing hard. Composing himself, he met Hela's gaze.
"There's nothing I can't share.
"I can no longer just observe luck. I can directly perceive the fate river corresponding to each of you. It ranges from the main course to the tributaries, but most is indistinct. I can only clearly detect it when actively using my fate-hunting ability, and there's a time constraint.
"Indeed, among the fate river tributaries I saw, one likely leads to death..."
Lumian succinctly recounted his initial theory, the hue of his eyes gradually normalizing.
"If death isn't inevitable, it should be termed a death calamity," Franca remarked, focusing on the symbolic import of "black."
Death calamity? Lumian and Hela turned to Franca, awaiting clarification.
Franca laughed self-consciously.
"Simply put, if you navigate a catastrophe, crisis, or incident that could cause death, you might emerge alive."
I see... Lumian considered briefly before saying, "Then I'll dub this ability the Eye of Calamity—eyes that can perceive death calamities."
The name mattered little to him. Its utility was paramount.
Lumian then absorbed the mystical knowledge that had entered his body along with a Fate Appropriator's power.
A Fate Appropriator's core actually lay in fate appropriation, split into three abilities.
The first was Fate Appropriation. By touching the target's fate river, he could appropriate and extract the desired fate.
This differed somewhat from Fallen Mercury's abilities. One needn't kill the target to Appropriate their fate, but it required time. The less weighty the corresponding fate, the quicker the process, and vice-versa.
A fate fragment's weightiness denoted its significance to the target's overall fate.

Naturally, Lumian could also Appropriate a fragment of the target's fate by slaying them. Moreover, the target's overall fate would be locked without further changes. The time to complete the Appropriation was very brief.
As a Fate Appropriator, Lumian could compress two fate fragments within himself, surpassing Fallen Mercury's single one.
Usually, there could be three, but Lumian hadn't been a Dancer or acted as an Alms Monk. He hadn't even signed a full set of special contracts. Meaning, during the Inevitability domain's initial trio of stages, he had seldom neared the power bestower in daily life. The fusion with the powers was comparatively weak.
Had he not cultivated an Ascetic's core spirit, perhaps he could have stored merely one fate fragment.
The second ability was Fate Exchange, where one's accrued fate was traded for a specific fate of the target.
Ideally, the fate fragments' weightiness should match. Light for light, heavy for heavy. If not, the exchange would be quite slow, maybe taking five to six minutes.
The fate fragment's importance was one facet, while its importance to the individual was another. Together, they would influence the exchange speed. Still, generally, it was swifter than directly Appropriating the corresponding fate—
barring Appropriating from a slain target.
Be it Fate Appropriation or Fate Exchange, there were limits barring him from attacking targets until he finished them.
In this respect, it lacked Fallen Mercury's convenience and flexibility.
The third ability was Compelling Fate. It entailed expending an enormous amount of spirituality to directly compel the target's future toward a tributary.
Originally, this ability didn't function this way. It primarily swayed the target's future fate via rituals, curses, and other means. Yet, after fusing with the Reaper trait, it could directly compel fates.
This combination with the Eye of Calamity allowed Lumian to discern certain possibilities.
Naturally, after careful assessment, he deduced his dual spirituality as a Reaper and Fate Appropriator could only permit two compulsions.
A Fate Appropriator's core abilities are the deepening and streamlining of the Luck Transference Spell... Lumian gave an overall appraisal.
Upon becoming a Fate Appropriator, the ceiling of contracts he could withstand as a Contractee had hit twelve. The endurance

stemming from being an Ascetic had also risen markedly.
This spurred Lumian to mull signing two to three more contractual abilities down the line to diversify his combat style and bolster his related trump cards.
However, he wouldn't truly sign all twelve, not even ten. That would surpass an Ascetic's endurance. Lumian had no wish to become a pseudo-inferior Beyonder like Padre Guillaume Bénet, whose weaknesses could be readily grasped and actions predicted.
Another notable shift in an Ascetic was the accumulation of external fate fragments. It had genuinely become a vital component of a Fate Appropriator.
As for rituals such as the Animal Creation Spell, they could be streamlined. For instance, Lumian previously had to drape the target with a ritual sheepskin to transform them into sheep by chanting the incantation. Now, he could use a more symbolic sheepskin to cover the other party to meet the prerequisite.
His flexibility as a Dancer had also grown. Lumian could now perform horrific and incredible actions. If ordinary folk merely glimpsed the corresponding shadows he cast, they would deem him a monster.
Furthermore, Lumian's spirituality had climbed substantially. The most basic yardstick was that he could employ up to 17 Spirit World Traversals.
Nonetheless, both a Fate Appropriator and a Reaper had scant impact on his physical prowess.
After verifying his transformation, Lumian thanked Madame Hela and asked when the next Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society meeting would be before returning to the real world with Franca.
Having returned The Fool's gold coin to Jenna, Lumian briefly outlined a Fate Appropriator's abilities and stated,
"Given my ability to directly perceive some fate fragments, I'll settle on the concrete plan after observing Moran Avigny up close."
"Okay." Franca thoroughly endorsed any step that could lessen the risk.
Lumian rose and said to Franca and Jenna,
"I'll head out first then. Don't forget to help me inquire at your mysticism gatherings if there's the Harvest Priest potion formula and the matching Beyonder ingredients."
"Got it." Seeing Lumian off, Franca turned to Jenna, puzzled. "Why is he acting a bit odd? Doesn't he usually rile people up and quip before leaving?"
Jenna also found this atypical and sank into deep thought.
Abruptly, her expression changed.
Jenna glanced down at the book in her hand, saying pensively,

"Perhaps he just received the boon's power and isn't in a stable state. He needs to hurry back and rest."
Franca nodded, understanding. "Fair point."
She didn't linger on it or bother to. The night was lovely, and she couldn't squander it on such trivial matters.
...
Avenue du Boulevard, outside the Champs-Élysées' Rose Conference Room.
Numerous reporters stood before the hotel's signature indoor golden fountain, awaiting the arrival of Minister of Industry Moran Avigny, who had finished negotiations with the Loen Kingdom's delegation.
Lumian had switched into a pre-prepared black tweed coat and half top hat. He held a rented, new black-and-white camera without a tripod. With his unremarkable, passerby-
like appearance, he mingled with these individuals as a fake reporter.

Chapter 704: Fragment of Fate

The reporters waiting outside the conference hall displayed no signs of impatience or dissatisfaction, despite the passing time. They were well accustomed to such situations.

At last, the heavy doors of the Rose Conference Hall opened, revealing the Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny. Dressed in a sharp formal suit, his dark-gray eyes and chiseled features stood out as he emerged alongside the leader of the Loen Kingdom's delegation.

Snap! Snap! A flurry of loud camera flashes illuminated the scene, and Moran Avigny responded with a graceful wave to the reporters.

Lumian refrained from pushing his way to the front, choosing instead to observe Moran Avigny from a distance, hidden among the crowd.

Shielded by the camera, his azure eyes rapidly shifted to a silver-black hue.

Eye of Calamity!

In Lumian's enhanced vision, a river of mercury materialized on Moran Avigny's body, composed of ethereal water droplets. Each droplet was adorned with intricate, interconnected symbols.

As Moran Avigny delivered a concise speech announcing various industrial cooperation agreements between the Intis Republic and the Loen Kingdom, Lumian meticulously analyzed the Minister of Industry's past, present, and future, uncovering the fragments of fate concealed within each mercurial droplet.

The more distant the past, the greater the ambiguity. Lumian concentrated on the events of the preceding two weeks.

He witnessed Moran Avigny residing in a government-provided villa, attending weekly gatherings at cafés to discuss matters of state, exemplifying Trier's café politics.

Furthermore, Lumian observed Moran Avigny's attendance at salons, balls, banquets, operas, concerts, theaters, and art exhibitions. The Minister indulged in polo, poker, hunting in the suburbs, and flirtations with courtesans. He leveraged his position to secure favors, such as appointing the husband of one of his lovers as the deputy general manager of the Intis Industrial Credit Bank's Southern Continent branch—a coveted role known for its prestige, generous compensation, and influence. The sole drawback was the necessity of leaving Trier for the Southern Continent for two to three years, initially without the companionship of spouse and children.

These observations aligned perfectly with Lumian's preconceived

notions of Trier's elite society.
Amidst the hazy fragments, two particular instances captured Lumian's attention.
In one, Moran Avigny sat alone in his study, perusing a document. Abruptly, he jotted down a note and reached into a nearby mirror. His hand, seemingly incorporeal, passed through the glass surface, depositing the note within.
The other featured Moran Avigny's fleeting encounter with an unfamiliar individual during a hunting excursion in the West Lognes Forest. What piqued Lumian's interest was the thin, white fog enveloping this fragment, rendering it indistinct.
This peculiar obscurity differed from the typical vagueness of most fate fragments.
The first fragment confirmed Moran Avigny's identity as a Mirror Person. Among the 22 paths of the divine, Demonesses proficient in mirror magic could not transmit information or objects through mirrors until attaining the rank of Sequence 4 demigods. If Moran Avigny were a demigod-level Demoness, his existence as a man would be impossible.
Lumian could only surmise two possibilities:
First, Mirror People possessed an innate mastery over mirrors, surpassing even Demonesses in the realm of mirror magic.
Second, Moran Avigny had originally been a Demoness at the demigod level who later consumed a higher Sequence Hunter potion, successfully transforming into a man. This implied that the Minister of Industry was at least a Sequence 3 Saint, if not an Angel.
Considering the intelligence gathered by Franca and the others, the information provided by 007, and the clearer fate fragments, Lumian concluded that Moran Avigny had never exhibited any Hunter-related traits. He was undoubtedly a Mirror Person, albeit an extraordinary one.
The second fate fragment intrigued Lumian due to its relative uniqueness. It might contain crucial information, but deciphering it eluded him for the moment.
Shifting his focus to Moran Avigny's future, Lumian examined the myriad potential fate tributaries.
As anticipated, one tributary bore a faint black tinge.
This mercurial offshoot, like many others, "rehearsed" Moran Avigny's interview and subsequent return to the Ministry of Industry in a private carriage. However, it diverged when, upon entering his office and sitting for a while, Moran Avigny willingly stepped into the full-body mirror near the coat rack and vanished.
Lumian's foresight extended no further.

Based on his observations, Lumian deduced that if Moran Avigny ventured into the mirror world before noon, he would face a life-threatening calamity.
Yet, the probability of Moran Avigny taking such an action was minimal. Among the numerous fate tributaries, only one represented this possibility.
Certainly, if Lumian disregarded the risk of exposure, he could harness nearly half of his spirituality to manipulate Moran Avigny's future, steering it towards that specific tributary. However, such an act would be futile.
Moran Avigny's demise in the mirror world would merely prevent them from accessing his corpse and conducting the spirit channeling ritual.
The Demoness of Black likely possesses the ability to enter the mirror world as well. However, with her as the spirit channeler, obtaining the relevant information would prove impossible. Even if Franca has fully earned her trust, certain knowledge would remain undisclosed until she attains a specific Sequence... Lumian noticed Moran Avigny's posture signaling the conclusion of the interview, and his bodyguards began navigating through the reporters. Consequently, Lumian ceased using the Eye of Calamity and captured a black-and-white photograph, maintaining his façade.
Subsequently, he gradually retreated from the throng of reporters and made his way to the public washroom. He stashed the camera within his Traveler's Bag, donned Lie, and transformed back into Ciel Dubois. As a guest, he entered the annex restaurant of Champs-Élysées.
Franca awaited him there.
Following the waiter to his designated spot, Lumian noticed a man and a woman engaged in coffee.
The woman possessed black hair, brown eyes, and an alluring beauty. Her attire accentuated her slightly exaggerated aura. The man, by contrast, appeared ordinary, clad in a double-
breasted flannel coat, wrinkled pants, buckled leather boots, and a top hat adorned with soft fur—the favored ensemble of Trier's bankers and financiers in recent times.
Lumian noticed that the man and woman weren't attracted by any aura of wealth. Instead, he recognized the beautiful woman with foreign features.
She, of course, had no knowledge of him. He had only glimpsed her photograph in Ghost Face.
She was Perle, a theater actress from Loen and a courtesan in Trier.

DuVar, the inventor of DuVar's broth and proprietor of the esteemed restaurant, had once lavished a substantial sum on her. He had even attempted suicide because of her, albeit unsuccessfully.
At present, Perle and the middle-aged man, presumed to be a banker, had not yet begun their meal. They were simply savoring their coffee.
The middle-aged man picked up Perle's empty coffee cup and gestured to the grounds, explaining something unknown to Lumian. The courtesan listened intently.
As he passed by, Lumian's keen senses allowed him to briefly eavesdrop. He swiftly grasped that the middle-aged man, believed to be a banker, was immersed in the art of coffee ground divination.
This popular divination method in high society was more akin to a game.
"If the remaining coffee grounds after drinking form a circle, it signifies recent signs of love..."
Upon hearing the middle-aged man's words, Lumian couldn't help but silently critique: Are you going to suggest that you'll be the love she's about to encounter?
Any other woman, even aware of the man's true intentions, would be secretly alarmed by divination results indicating traces of love. They might believe it to be fate's guidance. The various patterns naturally formed by the residual coffee grounds were thought to hold corresponding revelations about one's destiny, a notion widely accepted and impossible to manipulate.
However, given Perle's experience as a seasoned courtesan and her bold demeanor, Lumian had cause to suspect that she had deliberately manipulated the coffee grounds into a circular formation through her drinking technique.
After walking a short distance, Lumian spotted Franca.
The Demoness of Pleasure was dressed as a lady today, perfectly suited for the occasion. Lumian almost failed to recognize her.
Naturally, Franca still refrained from wearing a dress, opting instead for a pantsuit.
Observing Franca's elegantly styled hair, no longer in a ponytail, Lumian chuckled and remarked, "Jenna did your hair for you?"
"Indeed!" Franca responded, not with humiliated rage, but with a sense of smugness.
Before they could delve into their observations, a nearby waiter approached, presenting them with two identical menus.
Lowering her voice, Franca addressed Lumian in ancient Feysac, "The lunch set costs 7 verl d'or. If we order individually and indulge

in some decent red wine, the bill for the two of us will amount to at least 50 verl d'or. That sum could easily feed your godson in the market district."
Franca found the restaurant at Grand Champs-Élysées not only expensive but also intriguing.
Switching to Intisian, Franca inquired of the waiter, "Any recommendations?"
The waiter, who had been sneaking glances at Franca, responded eagerly, "Would you like to try the Fürth fish?
"In Trier, apart from certain private banquets, we are the sole establishment that serves Fürth fish."
"What makes it so special?" Lumian asked, curiosity piqued.
Addressing Franca, the waiter explained, "Fürth fish appear semi-charred and can only be found in a specific section of Trier's underground river. Legend has it that long ago, they were ordinary fish. One day, an individual named Fürth caught one and set up a frying pan by the underground river, intending to cook it. Midway through the process, the fish managed to escape the frying pan and return to the river. It survived and spawned numerous descendants, all bearing the semi-charred appearance.
"The skin of this fish is fragrantly browned and oily, yet the flesh within is exceptionally tender..."
Trier's underground river... Half-burnt... Alive... Lumian extracted the keywords and suddenly speculated that this might be a consequence of the leakage of Fourth Epoch Trier's Hunter powers.
Smiling at Franca, he proposed, "Shall we each have one?"
"Very well." Franca had already been contemplating giving it a try.

Chapter 705: Past

After the waiter left their secluded table with the order, Lumian picked up his tri-colored liqueur—a vibrant mix of red, white, and blue—and clinked glasses with Franca before taking a sip.

Glancing around to ensure no one could overhear, he quietly recounted the detailed fate fragments of Moran Avigny. As Franca listened, her expression gradually morphed, a frown creasing her lovely brow.

"That white, thin fog you described... it reminds me of something," she said. "Does it have a mercurial, ever-shifting nature?"

Lumian considered briefly before nodding. "Yes, it does."

Franca let out a soft sigh. "It must be the same phenomenon then. You know how I told you about Jenna and I getting tailed by that entrustee of the vanished Deep Valley Cloister gatekeeper at the mysticism gathering? The one we ended up fighting?

"Well, when I channeled the guy's spirit and asked about his organizational ties, his physical form and spirit abruptly detonated. My mirror cracked from the blast, but right before shattering, it filled with that same thin, mercurial white mist."

Franca paused, collecting her thoughts.

"According to the intel I passed along, 007 ran into a similar fog during their investigation of Deep Valley Town. Albert Goncourt, the Carbonari's leader, was spotted there too.

"As you're aware, the Carbonari played a role in stoking the riots during the Hostel plan. Their other leader, operating under the alias General Philip, spearheaded that particular scheme."

Lumian swiftly connected the dots Franca was laying out.

"So you suspect the Carbonari is in league with multiple evil god cults, this peculiar white fog being tied to one of them—and that Moran Avigny is also entangled with this group. Meaning our supposedly chance encounter with him in the West Lognes Forest was anything but."

"Precisely." Franca took another sip of her liqueur. "And what's the ultimate endgame for these Mirror People? Surely not mere replacement of their originals."

The mirror version of Gardner Martin had failed to succeed the real one, understandably using the Hostel plan to deal with his counterpart. But Moran Avigny, also a Mirror Person, had quietly replaced the original for decades, even fathering an illegitimate daughter and living a cushy life. *Why collaborate with cults?*

Smiling, Lumian replied, "The goals of Mirror People as a whole versus as individuals are bound to differ. Investigating should reveal the former. Back in Fourth Epoch Trier, Mirror Gardner

Martin mentioned their loyalty and service to someone who holds all the answers. Learning that person's identity should tell us the Mirror People's endgame."
Franca concurred succinctly, "We can plan our next moves around this strange fog. Deal with Moran Avigny to get more info on the Mirror People, which is already a lead. And capturing him or channeling his spirit could present other opportunities."
Franca smiled. "Looks like 007 will be busy again."
Their discussion of Moran Avigny complete, Lumian picked up some roasted pre-meal bread, chewing as he recounted his encounter with Courtesan Perle and the coffee ground divination he'd witnessed.
"She's unlikely to be a Demoness," Franca concluded, a hint of disappointment in her voice.
Based on Lumian's description and reaction to Perle's appearance, she could tell the courtesan wasn't a Demoness.
Unless deliberately feigning ugliness, a Demoness's charms were impossible to conceal. Even gay men couldn't resist sneaking a few extra glances.
"Definitely not..." Lumian suddenly paused, remembering something.
Shifting to casual conversation, he asked, "Does coffee ground divination actually hold mystical significance? Can it truly provide revelation?"
Franca finished her bread, took another sip of the colorful liqueur, and smiled. "Of course mysticism is involved."
Noting Lumian's lack of divination knowledge compared to his skill in reading fate, Franca explained with a smug grin.
"You don't need to put divination on some holy, unattainable pedestal.
"Our Astral Projections constantly interact with the spirit world, obtaining information and receiving revelations. These get reflected in reality through various forms.
"It's true for both Beyonders and ordinary people. But those unskilled in divination struggle to proactively obtain revelations or effectively interpret them.
"For example, if a Beyonder chokes on a fishbone while eating, they'll quickly realize it's a warning from their spirit, containing a revelation needing interpretation. But if regular folks have the same experience, they'll just think they were unlucky or careless. It won't stand out enough to warrant deeper consideration or deciphering.
"Of course, getting a stuck fishbone doesn't always indicate a spiritual warning. Usually it's just lack of care. Skilled diviners can

tell the difference between a true revelation and a random occurrence. The unskilled tend to overthink, scaring themselves while ignoring what's truly concerning."
Given their upcoming fish course, Franca had used a relatable example.
Lumian nodded, gaining a clearer understanding of divination.
He asked thoughtfully, "So without deliberate control over the drinking method, coffee ground patterns can reveal something—but ordinary people's interpretations may be inaccurate?"
"Precisely!" Franca said excitedly. "In the most rational environment, the decades-popular coffee ground divination can come extremely close to reality. Each divination session can refine the standard interpretations until the meaning of every ground formation is definitively established. Then even regular people could interpret with reasonable accuracy.
"Sadly, reality is no bastion of pure rationality. Believers in coffee divination subconsciously work to make even mistaken interpretations come true. Non-believers plainly see the interpretations don't match up. These conflicting approaches get all tangled together, preventing the codification of standard, reliable answers. In the end, it's just a game."
As they conversed, the waiter served the various dishes, clearing used plates as part of the set procedure.
The fried Fürth fish arrived as a later main course.
Lumian cut a piece and tasted it—tender flesh with an intriguing blend of charred and oily notes, the pepper and salt seasoning just right.
"Delicious," Franca praised. "And warming too."
Lumian also felt a current of warmth spread through him as the Fürth fish reached his stomach.
"Some special ingredients indeed," he concluded, teasing Franca. "Just don't eat too fast—wouldn't want you choking on a bone."
Franca laughed. "You think a few bones can choke me?"
Glancing around to confirm the waiter's departure, she asked,
"I've been pondering something the last couple days. I still can't grasp the difference between using rituals and curses to influence a target's future fate versus directly compelling a fate change.
"I get the ritual part—it relies on the target's blood, close relatives, certain items, and mystically significant contact to alter their future fate. But how is that different from a curse?"
Lumian organized his thoughts before explaining.
"In the mysticism knowledge of Fate Appropriators, a curse is a curse of fate. Compared to rituals, curses are simpler, with fewer required conditions. But that significantly limits the ultimate

effect. Nothing too outlandish can be achieved.
"Many bestowed of Inevitability like to call this type of curse Magnified Fate.
"It can only target fate tributaries within the next ten seconds, and must align with the current environment and circumstances. Meeting those prerequisites enables the fate curse to succeed. And the targeted fate tributary needs a certain probability of manifesting in the first place, or the success rate plummets.
"Simply put, one first uses or alters the environment to enable certain possibilities, then magnifies those possibilities—
assuming they weren't extremely unlikely to begin with."
Lumian looked at Franca, raising his right palm to gesture as he mischievously provided an example.
"For instance, while you're eating fish, I could use a curse to magnify the chance of you choking on a bone. But I couldn't magnify the chance of your chair suddenly collapsing, impaling you with wood splinters."
The moment he finished speaking, Franca froze, gasping twice as her throat worked. Within seconds, she spat out a bloody fishbone.
"You actually did it?" Franca grumbled. "Luckily my Sequence grants strong throat control. I handled it myself. Uh..." Franca suddenly paused. After a few seconds, she said, "Otherwise we'd be seeking a doctor's aid. How embarrassing would that be!"
Lumian chuckled. "I could've helped pull it out, magnifying the fate tributary of successful extraction."
Franca was briefly speechless.
After eating another bite of Fürth fish, she nodded.
"I understand the differences now.
"Curses, or Magnify, suit combat. They're mainly for interfering with and influencing enemies, not accomplishing anything too exaggerated.
"Rituals are done in advance. With the right items, they can largely steer a target's fate as desired."
"But only in a general direction," Lumian added. "No real precision. I could make someone have a bad day, but not dictate the exact flavor of misfortune."
Franca nodded.
"So compelling fate is like a streamlined ritual for live combat that still packs a punch?"
"Perhaps even stronger and more precise effects," Lumian mused. "Plus, many abilities transformed in unique ways when Fate Appropriator and Reaper fused, bringing with them the relevant mystical knowledge. I can't fully distinguish the inherent from the individualized—I only know the Eye of Calamity and Compelling

Fate came from Reaper."
They enjoyed the rest of their lunch. As the meal concluded, Lumian pointed to the half-eaten Fürth fish, instructing the waiter, "I'd like this wrapped up to go."
The waiter complied respectfully without question. Franca smiled teasingly. "How frugal of you."
Lumian chuckled. "This is expected of a godfather. Besides, I'm curious what makes this fish so special."

Chapter 706: The Utility of Delicacies

In another apartment on Rue Orosay in the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, Lumian placed the cold Fürth fish in front of Ludwig.

Ludwig's eyes lit up when he saw the pan-fried fish in the exquisite wooden box. He quickly turned to Lugano, who understood his meaning and handed over a child's knife and fork he had found in the newly rented room.

Lumian leaned back in his chair and watched as Ludwig sliced the remaining half of the fish into pieces, chewing and swallowing the meat along with the bones.

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, Ludwig narrowed his eyes, seemingly enjoying himself, and said, "The Fürth Firefish is a mutated fish resulting from the corruption leaking from Fourth Epoch Trier. Its breed stabilized 769 years ago and mainly resides in the Danro section of the underground Madar River. Its meat and blood can be concocted into a 'warm cocktail' with various sunflowers. After drinking it, one can resist the effects of the cold to a certain extent for half an hour.

"A Fürth Firefish that has lived for over a decade is an ingredient rich in spirituality. Using its meat, blood from a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway, ice, and lemon juice, one can cook Ice Lemon Fish fillets. After anyone eats them for the first time, they permanently enjoy reduced damage from flames. Eating them later will enhance the effect, but it only lasts for half an hour."

Lumian nodded in enlightenment. In Franca's words, the first time it's eaten, it adds some permanent fire resistance. The subsequent enhancements are temporary...

Lugano was taken aback.

Ludwig actually knows cooking?

Moreover, it involves cooking with superpowers!

Can I help him get ingredients rich in spirituality and have him make similar delicacies for me?

It seems capable of permanently enhancing some of my abilities!

After Ludwig finished his meal, Lumian suddenly thought of something.

Franca's ritual for advancing to the Demoness of Affliction involved being burned at the stake—without using a substitute—for fifteen minutes and surviving without going mad.

If Franca eats Fürth Firefish's Ice Lemon Fish fillet to increase her fire resistance, although the pain won't abate, her chances of surviving the incineration will greatly increase. When the time

comes, she can eat some more temporarily before the ritual.
Lumian's thoughts raced as he quickly made up his mind.
Today, he would head to Underground Trier to search for Fürth Firefish that had lived for over a decade!
From his Traveler's Bag, Lumian retrieved a map of Underground Trier reconstructed from his memories, derived from the one Gardner Martin had once displayed. He searched for the location of the Danro section of the Madar underground river.
As Lumian scrutinized the map, he asked Ludwig with a smile, "How do you know the precise name of the source? Do Fürth Firefish have knowledge of the rivers they inhabit?"
Ludwig licked his lips, unsatisfied.
"Indeed, they do. From years of fishing, humans inevitably mention the names of rivers and specific sections. Even if Fürth Firefish don't comprehend the meaning, they instinctively retain this information in their corresponding cells when repeatedly exposed to it."
"Interesting." Lumian had posed the question in jest, not anticipating such a serious response.
Pointing to himself, he inquired curiously, "Will consuming the Ice Lemon Fish fillet reduce the burn damage I sustain?"
As a Reaper, flames inflict relatively minimal damage to him.
Ludwig picked up a minuscule remnant of the fish, no larger than a grain of rice, from the exquisite wooden box and presented it to Lumian. "Only this much."
Without hesitation, the boy promptly popped the morsel into his mouth.
"Well, that's better than nothing," Lumian remarked with a smile and a sigh.
He intended to secure a special serving of Ice Lemon Fish fillet for himself, with additional portions for Jenna, Anthony, Lugano, and Ludwig!
To accomplish this task, Lumian proactively inquired, "How does a Fürth Firefish that has lived for over a decade differ from its ordinary counterparts?"
Ludwig's response sounded as if he were reciting from a textbook, "A Fürth Firefish that has survived for more than a decade can grow to nearly a meter in length and tends to reside in caves at the riverbed. They rarely approach the surface but exhibit a keen sensitivity to blood and spiritually rich food. These fish are highly aggressive and willing to take significant risks driven by their instincts.
"Their skin has hardened, rendering them impervious to fishing spears. Sharp teeth fill their mouths, enabling them to devour any

humans who happen to fall into the river. Additionally, their blood possesses a distinct burning characteristic."
After attentively listening, Lumian calmly assessed the information.
Despite their longevity of over a decade, Fürth Firefish did not possess Beyonder characteristics or acquire supernatural abilities through boons. They belonged to a species that had undergone corruption but had since stabilized.
If they were to continue living in such an environment for tens of thousands of years, they might evolve into creatures with their own intricate society, akin to the Batings Black Insect.
As he put away the map and stood up, Lumian turned to Ludwig and asked thoughtfully before leaving,
"Apart from the permanent enhancements, does this special cooking method involve any adverse effects, such as corruption?"
Ludwig scrutinized Lumian and remained silent. Lumian suspected that Ludwig was internally mocking him.
For someone already deeply corrupted, the concern over a minuscule amount of additional corruption seemed trivial.
After a brief pause, Ludwig replied, "As a child, I lack understanding of such matters. What I do know is that if one desires to indulge in finer and more delectable cuisine, they must be willing to accept the associated risks. Those unwilling to take the risk can simply choose not to partake..."
Ludwig instinctively added, "If you don't wish to eat, you can always leave the food for me."
With a slight nod, Lumian opened the door and exited the apartment.
...
In the depths of Underground Trier, the Madar River flowed through a tranquil, deserted, and dimly lit cave, its gentle splashing echoing in the distance.
Emerging from the shadows, Lumian, Franca, and Jenna made their way to the riverbank. One carried a carbide lamp, while the other two traveled empty-handed.
Although ingredient suppliers seeking to monopolize Fürth Firefish guarded this section of the subterranean river, it posed no significant challenge for a Hunter and two Demonesses. Utilizing the shadows, they deftly navigated through the patrolled area and successfully reached the water's edge.
Raising his carbide lamp, Lumian discovered that the underground river was not only expansive but also incredibly deep. Submerged caves lined the riverbed, inhabited by peculiar fish.
After a quick survey, Lumian set the carbide lamp down, rolled up

his sleeves, and crouched beside the river.
Without hesitation, he plunged his right arm into the frigid water.
"Is this your preferred method of fishing?" Franca inquired, well aware of Lumian's penchant for "fishing." However, she hadn't anticipated him employing the same technique when his prey was, quite literally, fish.
"What alternative do I have?" Lumian chuckled. "Would you prefer I strip down, dive into the underwater caves, and catch them with my bare hands?"
"That's not an impossibility," Franca replied with a playful smile. "It would provide an excellent opportunity to admire your physique."
Ignoring her comment, Lumian focused his spirituality, causing a thin layer of white flames to emanate from his thumb.
The flames, resistant to the water's extinguishing effect, took the form of a small knife and carefully sliced his index finger. A single drop of blood seeped out, rapidly dispersing into the surrounding water.
The Fürth Firefish swimming in the shallows seemed to detect an ominous presence and swiftly retreated from the area where the blood had spread.
Moments later, enormous Fürth Firefish, their skin charred and hardened, emerged from the caves along the riverbed.
One particularly swift specimen reached Lumian's right hand in a flash, its mouth wide open to reveal sharp, gleaming teeth. Before it could sink its teeth into his flesh, Lumian's palm abruptly clenched into a fist. Instead of withdrawing, he thrust his hand forward, punching directly into the fish's gaping maw.
With a resounding bang, Lumian grasped the creature's skull and hauled the colossal Fürth fish out of the river.
Silently, cold and sinister black flames ignited in the river, incinerating Lumian's blood that had merged with the water.
It was Jenna.
"We can return now," Lumian declared, tossing the massive Fürth fish to Franca.
As Franca caught the ingredient, freezing it and storing it in her Traveler's Bag, she appeared lost in thought.
Keenly observing her demeanor, Lumian asked, "What's on your mind?"
Pointing in a specific direction, Franca responded, "I remember that nearby, we entered a unique mirror world and acquired the classic silver mirror that granted Anthony and me access to Fourth Epoch Trier."
"Indeed," Lumian acknowledged, gesturing for Franca to continue.

Averting her gaze, Franca expressed her thoughts, "I'm contemplating whether we could utilize the mirror world to stage an ambush against Moran Avigny. Specifically, I'm referring to the conventional mirror world that interconnects all the mirrors in this world."

In the conventional sense, the mirror world functioned more akin to a conceptual amalgamation of doors rather than a tangible realm. It served as an intricate network of passageways linking various mirrors and enigmatic lands. In essence, if Franca could harness the mirror world and pinpoint the precise location, she could conceal herself behind the mirror frequently used by Moran Avigny and launch an attack the moment her target entered.

"What is it that you truly wish to convey?" Lumian raised his eyebrows.

Franca eagerly elaborated, "Considering that a portion of the corruption from Fourth Epoch Trier has seeped into this area, giving rise to unique creatures like Fürth Firefish and the extraordinary mirror world we previously explored, is it plausible that within this vast underground expanse, there exists a secluded corner influenced by the corruption of a select few high-level Demoness powers over an extended period?

"Could it be possible for one to traverse through the mirror and enter the mirror world without attaining the status of a demigod Demoness?"

After a moment of serious contemplation, Lumian replied, "It's a possibility."

Jenna's eyes darted around as she suggested, "Could it be the location where you discovered the special mirror? That area must have been corrupted by the power emanating from Fourth Epoch Trier's mirror world."

"We can investigate," Lumian said with a smile. "There's no need to rush. If it proves unsuccessful, we can bide our time. Once Hisoka's Beyonder characteristic is transformed into a Sealed Artifact, perhaps we can assume the form of Wraiths and conceal ourselves within the mirror. However, I'm uncertain whether Wraiths possess the ability to navigate the mirror world."

"Let's prioritize the search!" Franca declared, retrieving her Mirror World Fragment. She hoped that this item might provide some unique means of detection.

Lumian glanced at the fragment and, after a brief contemplation, advised seriously, "Holding the Mirror World Fragment is unlikely to yield any benefit. Instead, take out the Primordial Demoness figurine."

Chapter 707: Compulsion

In the dark, silent tunnel, Franca advanced slowly, holding the Primordial Demoness figurine made of bone. Her footsteps were so soft they were nearly inaudible.

Lumian, clutching his carbide lamp, and Jenna trailed silently behind her.

With a Hunter's keen understanding of the terrain and memories, the three had finished exploring the area where they had obtained the classic silver mirror. They had even expanded their search to include the nearby underground tunnels and connected quarry caves.

However, the Primordial Demoness figurine showed no abnormal reactions, and neither Franca nor Jenna sensed anything out of the ordinary.

Franca sighed. "Well, this is disappointing. Bold assumptions leading to a shameful failure!"

She had no intention of giving up, but wanted to return to the surface first and contact 007. She hoped to use the authorities' detailed records of underground abnormalities to search for any areas where a high-level Demoness's power might be seeping out.

Having experienced numerous mystical incidents, Lumian surveyed the area, pondering for a few seconds.

"Let's investigate again. This time, I'll extinguish the carbide lamp.

"In mysticism, Demonesses and the mirror world are always associated with darkness, evil, and quiet depth. Perhaps subtle reactions can occur in the absence of light."

"Subtle reactions... What is this, a chemistry experiment?" Franca scoffed, but chose to comply. She turned to Jenna. "Hold your Mirror World Fragment in your hand. If we're giving this a shot, we should try everything."

Jenna took out the Mirror World Fragment she had obtained from the Tamara family tomb, and Lumian turned the switch to extinguish the carbide lamp.

The silent tunnel plunged into absolute darkness. As a Hunter, Lumian couldn't see a thing.

"You can hold onto my sleeve," Jenna suggested calmly. "Or activate your Spirit Vision and follow our spiritual light."

Lumian replied with a smile, "That would make me look weak. I suspect you're deliberately showing off. Have you forgotten? I can gain night vision by changing my life form."

Jenna was silent for a moment before retorting, "Dammit! Would it kill you to be a bit nicer about it?"

"She's right," Franca agreed. "Jenna was just trying to help. It's fine

if you don't want her assistance, but there's no need to mock her."
"That's a Hunter for you." Lumian chuckled as he activated the black mark on his body, transforming into a shadow creature.
He blended into the shadows and followed Franca and Jenna as they explored the area for the second time.
As Franca passed a corner of a quarry cave, she suddenly felt the bone figurine in her hand tremble slightly.
"There's a reaction! There's a reaction!" she exclaimed joyfully.
Lumian immediately left the shadows, transforming back into human form, his blue eyes tinged with silver-black.
In the absolute darkness, he saw the mercury rivers of fate belonging to Franca and Jenna.
As his spirituality rapidly depleted from the brief observation, Lumian found a possibility among the tributaries symbolizing Franca's future fate.
This was something that might happen in ten seconds or more. Furthermore, the probability of it occurring was extremely low—something Curse, or rather, Magnify, couldn't influence.
Without hesitation, Lumian extended his right palm toward Franca.
Franca, with her night vision, witnessed his actions and noticed his silver-black eyes. She jumped in fright.
"W-what are you doing?"
She didn't dodge, fully trusting Lumian.
Lumian roused his spirituality, transforming it into a violent illusory river that surged out of his palm.
Franca's fate was instantly thrust into a future by the mighty torrent.
Compelling Fate!
Franca suddenly had an idea.
"Are you influencing my future, allowing me to successfully utilize the corrupted fate fragments here to make it a reality?
"Dammit, I really do have an idea. Maybe I should give it a try!"
Lumian, his spirituality greatly depleted, chuckled. "Life is short, why not give it a try?"
"..." Franca could clearly detect the mockery in his tone. She gritted her teeth. "I'll deal with you later!"
As she spoke, Franca placed the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine on a protruding rock in a corner of the mine. Then she took out a mirror and placed it in front of the figurine.
Lumian conjured a blazing white fireball and observed as Franca retrieved essential oils, extracts, perfume, and herbal powder from her Traveler's Bag, preparing for the ritual.
Uh... Lumian turned to Jenna, who happened to look back at him.

Franca simultaneously turned to face them.
The three were taken aback for a moment before bursting into laughter.
"You two thought of it too?" Franca said happily. "Jenna shouldn't stay here. The Primordial Demoness might cast Her gaze here later."
As a pure female Demoness, it would definitely not bode well for Jenna to be noticed by the Primordial Demoness. It could even mean death.
Lumian replied with a smile, "I'll send Jenna back first and come back after the ritual."
With that, he reached out and grabbed Jenna's shoulder.
Jenna said to Franca, "Be careful."
"Don't worry, I'm a skilled worker," Franca replied, waving her hand cheerfully.
As a member of the Demoness Sect, she regularly prayed to the Primordial Demoness through the bone figurine, following the Demoness of Black's instructions. Occasionally, she even held a solo Mass.
Of course, this was the first time she would be praying to the Primordial Demoness through a ritual.
After Lumian teleported away with Jenna, the quarry cave returned to darkness.
With the bone figurine, Franca decided to use a dualistic ritual.
After lighting the candle representing herself, she drew her needs on a faux goatskin with the corresponding symbols and patterns, drawing upon her extensive mysticism knowledge.
Following that, she sanctified the ritual silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality. She dripped rose essential oil, musk, and perfume into the candle flame.
Franca's heart skipped a beat as the alluring, complex scent quickly entered her nostrils. She couldn't help but inhale deeply.
After completing all the preparations, Franca took two steps back and recited the Primordial Demoness's honorific name in Hermes.
"The source of all catastrophes, the symbol of destruction and the apocalypse, the Demoness who controls Chaos."
In the altar, a small amount of moss suddenly grew, entangling into vines that rose high, as if staring at Franca.
The ground softened, and a frigid wind blew, causing Franca to tremble.
Simultaneously, Franca sensed the fragrance in the area grow sweeter, carrying a warm charm that made her blush.
This invigorated her specific desires, and charming scenes surfaced in her mind.

Suppressing the heat in her body and shaking off her discomfort, Franca briefly recounted how Moran Avigny was a Mirror Person and how she wanted to capture him. Then, following the ritual's standard procedure, she said,
"I pray for the power of the mirror.
"I pray for the power of chaos.
"I pray for God's protection.
"I pray for a fixed entrance to the mirror world to appear here.
"Roses, a herb that belongs to the Demoness, please pass your power to my incantation.
"Musk, a herb that belongs to the Demoness, please pass your power to my incantation..."
After reciting the incantation, Franca ignited the faux goatskin and placed it on the mirror in front of the bone figurine.
As the faux goatskin burned away, Franca felt the candle flame dim, as if a layer of translucent mullioned glass had materialized around it.
A strange power was activated, gathering in the mirror.
The human-head-sized mirror suddenly darkened, turning shadowy and illusory.
It melded with the protruding rock where the figurine was placed and vanished.
In the next moment, the candle flame returned to normal, and the fragrance lingering in the air still unsettled Franca. Her thoughts raced, requiring immense strength to control herself.
After tidying up the bone figurine and other items, Franca took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.
Dammit, just the charm and pleasure emanating from the ritual nearly made me lose myself. All I wanted was to approach the source of the charm and enjoy the pleasures bestowed by Her.
As expected of the Primordial Demoness who controls pleasure and feminine charm...
Dammit! I'm an idiot. *Why did I take a deep breath?* The smell here hasn't dissipated!
I need to quickly confirm if there's an entrance to the mirror world before heading back to Jenna...
As these thoughts raced through Franca's mind, she saw Lumian's figure swiftly materialize at the edge of the quarry cave.
Franca jumped in fright. "Why are you back already?"
Lumian chuckled. "You're in pretty good shape. Didn't I say I'd return after your ritual...?"
As he spoke, Lumian noticed Franca's lake-blue eyes rippling under the dim candlelight, as if they could captivate one's soul.
Lumian's words faltered.

After a brief pause, he added, "Besides, Jenna was worried about you and asked me to come check on you.
"I believe the Primordial Demoness can understand that a Demoness of Pleasure has a friend who cares about her."
"Yeah." Franca nodded gently, bit her lip, and pointed at the protruding rock. "That spot seems to have become a fixed entrance to the mirror world. Let's see if we can enter."
Lumian didn't inquire further. He approached the protruding rock and, together with Franca, extended his right palm, pressing it against the cold stone.
A faint light flickered, and the two vanished on the spot.
After a brief moment of vertigo, a dark, illusory path appeared before Lumian and Franca's eyes. Surrounding them were numerous similar "tunnels," intertwining to form a complicated and mysterious colossal spiderweb.

Chapter 708: Remnant Influence

Is this an ordinary mirror world? Lumian gazed at the dark, illusory paths around him that resembled a mosquito landing on a complicated spiderweb. For some reason, he felt a surge of fear, as if a colossal, warped, pitch-black spider could crawl out from the depths of this strange land at any moment and drag him and Franca into the darkness that symbolized destruction.

"Is every illusory path connected to a mirror?" Franca's voice suddenly echoed in Lumian's ears, so close he could hear her breathing.

Simultaneously, Lumian caught a whiff of a warm, sweet fragrance. His blood vessels inexplicably pulsed, and his body and mind relaxed slightly.

At some point, Franca had moved to his side, her eyes flickering as she surveyed their surroundings.

Lumian nodded slightly. "In theory, yes."

"No!" Franca rejected her speculation. "They might also be connected to some mysterious alternate space."

"That's right..." Lumian recalled his understanding of the mirror world.

He exhaled and took a step forward.

"I believe those situations should also be connected to mirrors, mirrors that belong to those mysterious alternate spaces."

Without waiting for Franca's response, he pointed at the dark illusory path ahead and said,

"Before understanding the mirror world's coordinates and location, recklessly traversing this place is likely very dangerous. If we're lucky, we might only end up at the wrong mirror and have no choice but to return to the real world. If we're unlucky, we'll reach a mirror representing a dangerous place. When we leave, we'll have to face terrifying enemies. If we're super unlucky..."

At this point, Lumian paused.

Franca squeezed to his side and asked in a soft voice, "What happens if we're super unlucky?"

"W-we'll vanish from this mirror world forever. We won't be seen alive, and if we're dead, our corpses will go missing." Lumian composed himself and took another step forward.

All of a sudden, he sensed the dark, illusory path morph into a massive vortex, tugging him into its depths.

Franca experienced a comparable sensation, her spirituality sending her a powerful warning.

They both stepped back in unison, evading the absorption of the fearsome vortex.

"How treacherous," Franca sighed. "Just getting close to these illusory paths without going further can make you plummet into an unknown mirror. Maybe we can only count on the luck of Winners in a situation like this. Let's hope our destination isn't too terrible. Uh, your Magnify or Compelling Fate abilities should come in handy."

Lumian nodded.

"I initially thought the mirror world was closely tied to the spirit world, and teleportation would work here too. But from what I can see, while there is a connection, it's not strong enough to enable my teleportation. It's not that I can't teleport, but it's way too risky. There's nearly a 100% chance of getting lost.

"Without comprehending the abilities associated with the mirror world, I don't suggest using this place to ambush Moran Avigny, unless we're aided by a high-level Demoness or a high-level Apprentice."

Noticing Franca nod pensively, Lumian sighed in relief and intentionally taunted, "Have you recovered?"

"Huh?" Franca was startled momentarily before her embarrassment morphed into anger. "What other option do I have? When I use a ritual to seek aid from the Primordial One, I'm inevitably impacted. Sometimes I'm lured, sometimes I'm in pain, and sometimes I'm dejected, as if I've temporarily developed a mental disorder. Sometimes I go rigid for a while, as if I've been petrified..."

Since officially joining the Demoness Sect, the Demoness of Black had shared extensive mysticism knowledge with Franca, particularly concerning prayers to the Primordial Demoness.

On such topics, the Demoness of Black explained: As the ritual's host, the ritual itself granted a degree of protection. The extent to which she was influenced by the Primordial One's overflowing presence was quite minimal. Once the ritual concluded, she would recover after withstanding it for ten to twenty seconds. The only thing to watch out for was the desires arising from their typical reaction to being entranced by the Primordial One. Their fading would be comparatively gradual, but what Demoness didn't have numerous lovers? There was no need to be overly concerned about this.

The longer Franca talked, the more forceful she became, even a tad aggrieved.

"That's a genuine deity. How can I possibly resist a genuine deity's overflowing influence?

"If I weren't the ritual's host, I would've been unable to restrain myself and would've unleashed my primal instincts."

Franca couldn't suppress a chuckle at the reference to her primal nature.
Within the mirror world, she had consistently called the Primordial Demoness the Primordial One to prevent blasphemy.
After pondering for a moment, Lumian replied, "Praying to a different genuine deity won't lead to anything comparable unless someone present is blasphemous."
"It's the Primordial One's fault for being in such a terrible state." Franca had already come up with the justification. "Don't assume you can withstand it simply because you're an Ascetic. If you had been there and not the ritual's host, I would've witnessed your primal nature erupt."
At this juncture, she appraised Lumian and grinned.
"It's not like you didn't react. Were you worried you couldn't restrain yourself, so you purposely exposed me and created an awkward situation?"
Subconsciously, Franca's breathing turned labored again.
Lumian scoffed.
"When I got there, the scene's lingering effects hadn't fully dissipated, and a peculiar fragrance permeated the air. That was a genuine deity. How could I withstand even the tiniest bit of a genuine deity's overflowing influence?"
He echoed Franca's words.
"Really? Is it merely due to the lingering aroma?" Franca's lake-blue eyes narrowed menacingly, as if challenged.
The aqueous light in her eyes resurfaced, glittering like shards of sunlight.
Lumian exhaled and stepped to the side, grasping Franca's upper arm.
"I'll send you back first. Jenna is waiting for you."
"We're heading back already?" Franca asked, surprised. "Won't you explore the mirror world further and consider how to utilize this place?"
"I have a plan." Lumian tugged Franca away from the illusory tunnel's spiderweb-like darkness.
As they returned to the quarry cave, Franca, her focus diverted, inquired, "What plan?"
While Lumian tried to activate the black mark on his right shoulder, he responded impassively, "Contract ability."
He intended to establish a contract with a Beyonder creature possessing a mirror world traversal ability to acquire the corresponding characteristics!
Regardless, he hadn't determined which three abilities to contract this time. This could be one of them.

"You're right, a contract ability..." Franca was thrilled.
She then noticed Lumian was still motionless. Comprehending, she murmured into his ear, "Didn't you want to teleport? Why haven't we departed? Does your Spirit World Traversal activation always take this long, or are you enduring something?"
As Franca completed her sentence, the pair vanished from the gloomy quarry cave.
...
That evening, in Lumian's rented apartment, the nearly one-meter-long Fürth Firefish was set on the dining table. Ludwig used a child's table knife to break through the charred and tough fish skin, cutting the fair fish meat into pieces.
Lumian glanced at Franca, who had donned a light-colored hunting suit, and noticed the Demoness of Pleasure's gaze was elusive, brimming with embarrassment.
She appeared to be lamenting: Kill me! This is too mortifying. I don't want to live anymore!
Lumian, who had been feeling slightly embarrassed himself, smiled.
He mouthed to Franca,
"Post-nut clarity is truly remarkable."
Despite Franca's inability to lip-read, she still sensed Lumian's ridicule.
Pleasure is detrimental! Pleasure is detrimental! Irrespective of gender, when thoughts of pleasure dominate one's mind, one will invariably engage in various actions that result in their own ruin!
How humiliating!
I don't want to live!
In that instant, Franca longed for a crevice in the ground to conceal herself.
Anthony, sitting silently at the dining table, glanced at Lumian, then at Franca, before looking away.
At last, Ludwig removed the inedible parts and sliced the fish fillets into three soup pots.
Franca sealed one of the pots with ice and stored it in her Traveler's Bag for later use. Ludwig slid the other one to Lugano and spoke in a childish tone, "Can we have fish fillet and clam cream broth tonight?"
"Sure," Lugano promptly agreed.
He made an effort to avert his gaze from Franca and Jenna, the two Demonesses, believing it was disrespectful to his boss.
From his viewpoint, these two Demonesses were probably the boss's lovers.
He couldn't help but marvel inwardly.

As expected of the boss. He really has Demonesses as his lovers, and there are two of them!
Back then, Emperor Roselle only had one.
After adding a generous amount of lemon juice to the pot of fish fillets, Ludwig slid them toward Lumian.
His intention was evident. He required the blood of a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway.
"How much do you need?" Lumian inquired.
"Enough to stir it up," Ludwig replied, acting as if this was the bare minimum.
Jenna frowned and asked, "How much does each person need to eat to gain that permanent effect?"
Ludwig answered innocently, "Different physiques and Sequences need different quantities. You'll only find out when you actually eat it."
Lumian raised his eyebrows and poured the rest of Gardner Martin's blood into the soup pot.
Noticing it was still insufficient, he used a ritual silver dagger to slice his hand and dripped 20 to 30 milliliters of blood into it.
Ludwig observed with anticipation.
"Aren't you concerned about corruption?" Lumian asked with a smirk.
Ludwig shook his head. "The quantity here isn't substantial."
Franca tried her best to act normally and remarked with amusement, "Discussing toxicity without considering dosage is just playing the rogue."
"Indeed." Ludwig concurred with Franca and stirred the fish slices in the soup with a spoon.
Gradually, the tender-white fish soaked up the seemingly searing blood, and the fish slowly started to brown.
"Add some ice," Ludwig instructed Franca and Jenna.
The two Demonesses rose in unison and extended their hands toward the soup pot.
Drops of white frost condensed and descended like rain, noticeably slowing the browning of the fish until it ceased.
Ludwig leaped off his chair and dashed into the kitchen, returning with a few silver plates. He distributed seven to eight Ice Lemon Fish fillets to each of them.
"Is that all?" Jenna asked with a surprised smile.
"If it's not enough, you can have two or three more," Ludwig replied earnestly.
Jenna instinctively wanted to say something, but she refrained when she saw Ludwig's childlike demeanor.
She pointed at their plates and said, "Did you request so much of

Lumian's blood just to eat such a small portion of the fish?
"Why not prepare less and save the remaining half of the pot for tomorrow?"
Ludwig hugged the soup pot in front of him and shouted, "Mine!"
"..." Jenna suddenly felt like a witch stealing candy from a child.
He's definitely abusing his power... Lumian glanced at Ludwig and shook his head in amusement. "At least you have some sense when it comes to food."
With that, Lumian polished off all the Ice Lemon Fish fillets on his plate.

Chapter 709: "Chef"

The sour lemon flavor, tender fish texture, scorching aroma, and subtle sweetness with hints of fish and oil burst forth in Lumian's mouth. The taste exceeded his expectations.

He had anticipated dishes like this would be unpalatable and jarring, similar to a potion, but he never thought they would be considered delicious.

When given a choice, Ludwig has a genuine preference for delicacies and doesn't fool himself... Lumian chewed and swallowed the seven or eight fish slices.

A mild burning sensation spread from his throat to his stomach, reminiscent of drinking a glass of liquor.

The sensation quickly faded, and nothing unusual happened.

"That's it? It worked?" Lumian glanced at Ludwig.

Ludwig shook his head.

"Give it another two to three minutes for your stomach to absorb it."

"So fast?" Franca asked, surprised.

She respected mysticism, but having taken potions before, she knew they worked instantaneously. Ludwig's delicacies, however, seemed to require digestion and absorption by the stomach, contradicting how the organ typically functioned.

Plus, the stomach didn't absorb everything!

Ludwig responded seriously, "A Chef's creations can be rapidly absorbed by the stomach."

Chef... Lumian nodded, deep in thought.

He remembered Ludwig frequently commenting on various things like a food connoisseur.

Without further explanation, Ludwig buried his face in the soup pot before him and polished off the remaining Ice Lemon Fish fillets.

Jenna and the others promptly finished the fish slices on their own plates.

Two minutes later, Lumian felt his body growing warm, with a tingling sensation in his skin and flesh.

The effect on him was minimal. It paled in comparison to drinking a potion, let alone the pain of burning himself with flames.

Soon, Lumian returned to normal, his expression unaltered.

He glanced playfully at Franca, Jenna, and Anthony, waiting to see how the Ice Lemon Fish fillet would affect them.

A minute later, Jenna and the others suddenly flushed, as if they had eaten incredibly spicy food from the Feynapotter Kingdom highlands.

"Hiss..." Lugano let out a pained gasp, feeling a searing sensation in his breath.
Originating from within his body, he couldn't have treated it even if he wanted to.
Frost enveloped Franca's body, seemingly trying to soothe the pain in her skin and flesh.
It was futile.
Jenna and Anthony grimaced but made no unnecessary movements. They bore the discomfort, waiting for the Ice Lemon Fish fillet to finish transforming their bodies.
This lasted for ten to twenty seconds before the quartet's expressions relaxed.
"How does it feel?" Lumian asked with a smile.
Franca instinctively recalled the sensation and said, "It was like every inch of my skin and flesh had been burned. Hmm, not quite that intense—relatively mild..."
While speaking, she took a matchbox from her Traveler's Bag and experimentally lit two matches. She held them to the back of her left hand for a bit.
Franca's expression gradually contorted. She endured the pain in her left hand momentarily before pulling it back and shaking it.
The matchbox fell to the ground.
"It still hurts!" Franca reported the experiment results to Lumian and Jenna through gritted teeth.
Ludwig hastily replied, "It doesn't reduce pain."
"How's the wound?" Jenna asked, concerned.
Franca immediately checked the back of her left hand, seeing only slight burn marks on her pale skin with minimal physical damage.
"It works, even though the flame temperature wasn't that high, to begin with..." Franca's expression eased.
Across the dining table, Anthony carefully considered his words before saying, "I think I'm a bit more irritable than usual, but within reasonable limits."
Jenna added, "I'm grumpy too, but not drastically."
Franca and Lugano confirmed experiencing the same thing.
Swallowing the Ice Lemon Fish fillet, Ludwig explained, "That's to be expected. Effectiveness comes with corruption."
Jenna and Franca turned to Lumian.
Lumian spread his hands, smiling. "I don't feel any different."
For him, the Ice Lemon Fish fillet's corruption was negligible.
Franca wasn't sure whether to feel envious or sympathetic. After a moment's thought, she said, "This is like a milder version of being a Contractee—tolerating certain negative effects in exchange for

corresponding Beyonder traits. Sure, the effects are noticeably weaker, but the upside is it's passive. Plus, the negative effects are minimal.
"Going forward, when you get similar ingredients, you need to clarify the permanent and negative effects. You can't just eat everything. Choices have to be made. Otherwise, things can easily go wrong."
Lumian glanced at Ludwig and said, "That depends on the individual."
Maybe a Chef, or the Gourmet pathway, had Sequences that mitigated the corresponding impact, akin to Alms Monks and Ascetics who were Contractees.
Franca grasped Lumian's implication and continued excitedly,
"Dishes and concoctions without permanent effects are like various Apothecary pathway agents.
"I've always envied Contractees. I wanted the freedom to mix and match abilities, creating a unique character build. Now, without accepting an evil god's boon, I finally have a chance, albeit a diluted one."
Jenna's heart raced, and the two Demonesses gazed at Ludwig, eyes shining.
To them, he was no longer the gluttonous monster child Lumian had described, but a Beyonder chef deserving of their care and attention.
Ludwig concentrated on eating the leftover Ice Lemon Fish fillet, not reacting further.
...
In a quarry cave in Underground Trier.
Franca, Jenna, and Anthony stood beyond the spirituality wall, observing Lumian conduct the ritual to acquire new contract abilities.
Having thoroughly reviewed Madam Magician's information on spirit world entities and possessing the strange creature knowledge granted by the boon, Lumian swiftly identified two potential contract targets with mirror travel abilities.
The first was a spirit world being called Bloody Jack. According to the information, in the Loen Kingdom's south, some mysticism enthusiasts and folklore academics were playing a divination game when they spotted a blurry figure in the mirror wielding a large axe, drenched in blood. This figure would emerge from the mirror, assaulting and slaughtering everyone present.
The second was the Daratra Diamond Maggots, mentioned in the Contractee's mysticism knowledge. They could grant Mirror Traversal in exchange for sacrificing a crystallized meteorite. The

drawback was that one's body would become denser and shorter.
Lumian undeniably wanted to summon Bloody Jack but wasn't certain if it possessed an ability akin to Mirror Traversal.
Gazing at the three lit candles, Lumian stepped back twice and chanted in ancient Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era;
"You are the ruler above the gray fog;
"You are the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck.
"I beseech your shelter.
"I pray for your attention.
"I!
"In the name of the great Fool, I summon:
"The peculiar creature that wanders about the unfounded, the slaughterer hidden in the mirror, Jack from the bloody world..."
The bluish-black candle flame instantly swelled, forming an illusory door adorned with enigmatic patterns amidst the pervasive, eerie gray mist.
The door gradually opened, and darkness poured out, engulfing the mirror Lumian had placed on the altar.
The mirror abruptly levitated, pointing directly at Lumian. Within, an indistinct figure in a blood-stained old jacket dragged a massive axe.
Opening his mouth, Lumian made his throat and chest resonate as he spoke the Mystical Language of Fate.
Silver-black words akin to symbols materialized in midair, descending onto the faux goatskin at the altar's edge, forming a concise and ominous contract.
Upon the contract's formation, Lumian connected with Bloody Jack, comprehending its abilities and traits. He "listened" to its demands.
Bloody Jack possessed three mirror-related abilities and traits, which Lumian named Mirror Mark, Mirror Concealment, and Mirror Traversal.
Mirror Marks could invisibly mark a mirror, inverted from reality, to pinpoint a target. Mirror Concealment allowed the user to hide within the dark tunnels, avoiding being pulled into another mirror. Mirror Traversal enabled swift passage through the illusory tunnels.
Bloody Jack's demand was the sacrifice of 99 living humans.
Lumian pondered briefly, concluding that Mirror Mark was the optimal choice. Locating targets was paramount, and Mirror Traversal could be substituted with Spirit World Traversal. Rapid travel wasn't essential when he could arrive directly.
His eyes suddenly glinted silvery-black, mirroring Bloody Jack's

river of fate.
He wasn't seeking information about Bloody Jack. Instead, under the ritual's protection, he aimed to verify something.
After a quick observation, Lumian switched to ancient Hermes and asked Bloody Jack, "Can I alter the request?"
He was unsure if Bloody Jack would comprehend or respond, but asking was harmless. If not, he would have to write to Madam Magician, inquiring about other suitable mirror entities.
Having asked, Lumian immediately employed Magnified Fate, gaining a sharper view of Bloody Jack's fate for the next ten seconds.
Feigning nervousness, he moved his right hand as if to touch his face.
He Magnified a fate tributary!
Two to three seconds later, Bloody Jack's thoughts reached Lumian through the connection forged by the Mystical Language of Fate.
"Pull me out of the mirror!"
Lumian raised his eyebrows and stepped forward twice, extending his right hand toward the mirror hovering above the altar.
The moment his finger touched the glass mirror, he felt it dissolve into nothingness.
As Lumian fully inserted his palm into the mirror, a cold, damp, and distinctly sticky hand abruptly grasped his wrist.

Chapter 710: "Communication"

Lumian wasn't surprised when his wrist was grabbed by the wet hand.

He even chuckled. "Not bad. You only stained my wrist, not corrupt my entire arm."

As he spoke, he pulled back with all his might, feeling the abnormally heavy force opposing him.

Lumian's muscles swelled, and his body appeared to grow slightly larger.

At last, he saw the bloody figure in the jacket being dragged out of the empty mirror.

A bluish-black mist materialized, permeating the faux goatskin containing the ominous contract.

The contract burst into flames on its own, morphing into silver-black symbols and words. They linked together from end to end, creating an intricate and illusory pattern that abruptly passed through his clothes and settled between Lumian's chest and abdomen.

Having pulled Bloody Jack out of the mirror, Lumian had fulfilled the other party's request, and the contract was automatically fulfilled!

At that instant, Bloody Jack, who had regained his footing in front of the altar, raised his head.

His mutilated face turned towards Lumian as he lifted the blood-dripping axe with both hands.

Lumian's eyes, tinged with an iron-black hue, mirrored a two-toned figure of Bloody Jack.

One was a vivid red, enveloping every crevice of Bloody Jack's body, permeating every inch of space. The other was a pale white, no larger than a thumb. It was located at Bloody Jack's abdomen, enveloped by layers of bright red.

Much like Padre Cali in his untransformed Wraith state, he has only one vulnerability from head to toe, but it's not in his Spirit Body; it's concealed within his physical form... This seems to be composed of viscous blood. Regardless of the extent of damage or blood loss it endures, as long as the core remains unharmed, it will be unaffected... It bears some resemblance to the Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway, but it possesses mirror-related capabilities... As Lumian observed, a succession of thoughts calmly raced through his mind.

Bloody Jack's red spiderweb-like eyes displayed a ruthless and bloodthirsty expression. He raised his axe and swung it at Lumian's body.

The deal is done. Now, I'm going to kill you!
Bang!
The axe missed Lumian and hit the ground of the quarry cave, creating a deep fissure and sending gravel and dirt flying.
With a twisted flexibility that exceeded human limits, Lumian maneuvered behind Bloody Jack.
With a swift motion of his arm, Lumian punched out with his right fist.
Blazing white flames surged forth, a bright tail enveloping his fist and wrapping around his forearm.
Pfft! Lumian's fist felt as if it had plunged into a swamp. The deeper he went, the more muddy and sticky it became.
Rumble! He detonated the blazing white flames surrounding his fist, blasting open a passageway.
His fist and forearm sank into Bloody Jack's cavity, halting at the pale-white spot.
Just as Bloody Jack was about to turn around and swing his axe, he froze. His body rapidly disintegrated, turning into congealed blood that fell to the ground.
The blood clots writhed and reassembled into Bloody Jack, but there was still a gap in his abdomen that couldn't be filled.
Seeing this, Lumian's body ignited with a blazing white flame, ready to attack with all his might.
Bloody Jack instantly turned ethereal and retreated into the mirror on the altar.
Lumian chuckled and abandoned the pursuit, ending the summoning ritual at a moderate pace.
His objective had been achieved. He had acquired the contracted ability—Mirror Mark!
Previously, he had observed Bloody Jack's river of fate not to gather information about it, but to verify if this strange creature from the bloody world possessed godhood!
If Bloody Jack didn't have godhood, Lumian could complete some risky transactions with him to circumvent the requirement of 99 living sacrifices. If Bloody Jack had godhood, he would undoubtedly suffer a backlash. However, he was protected by the ritual and under Mr. Fool's gray fog's supervision, so he wouldn't be significantly affected.
It was precisely because he was aware of this that Lumian dared to agree to drag Bloody Jack out of the mirror, allowing him to no longer be restricted by the ritual.
It turned out that as long as the contracted party could communicate normally, the price to pay when signing the contract would be significantly lower.

Of course, there was no way to avoid the negative effects entirely. Although Lumian obtained the Mirror Mark, it would also make him more susceptible to attracting abnormal events and strange dangers related to mirrors.
As the crack created by Bloody Jack spread to the wall of spirituality, causing it to gradually disintegrate, Franca took the opportunity to curiously inquire about what had just transpired.
Lumian gave a brief account of his "negotiation" with Bloody Jack and smiled.
"I worked hard to reach Sequence 5 so that these evil creatures would be able to communicate with me calmly."
Franca couldn't resist laughing. "You call that calm?"
With a sigh, she said, "If it weren't for dealing with Moran Avigny, the Mirror Mark wouldn't be a wise choice. You wouldn't have much use for it normally. It's like wasting a contract slot."
This was due to Lumian's lack of mirror-related abilities. Without a fixed mirror world entrance, he couldn't pass through mirrors, let alone use the Mirror Mark to locate his target.
Lumian wasn't bothered by it.
"The Sealed Artifact corresponding to the Hisoka Beyonder characteristic might have the ability to transform into a Wraith. The Mirror Mark could be used to complement it."
"Let's hope that's the case," Franca said, sighing. "This is why Contractees can't compare to Shepherds. Once you sign a contract and gain an ability, you're stuck with it. Even if that ability becomes useless, it still takes up a slot and brings the associated negative effects."
Many contracted abilities were acquired to fulfill specific needs for a limited time. After that period, they often became useless. For instance, Lumian's Niese Face could only be used occasionally as an illusion during combat after he obtained the Lie earring.
Lumian smiled. "Who says I can't get rid of it?"
"Uh..." Franca was caught off guard.
Lumian's lips curved into a bright smile.
"Kill the contract target, and the contract will automatically be nullified."
Franca and Jenna gasped inwardly.
After a moment, Franca joked, "Very good. Keep that smile. That's the smile of a homicidal maniac—no, a Reaper."
Jenna nodded thoughtfully. "No wonder you didn't kill Bloody Jack just now and only scared it away. You were worried that the newly acquired abilities would vanish instantly. Didn't you mention you were planning to contract three abilities this time? Have you thought about the other two?"

"Yes." Lumian wasn't in a rush to complete the second ritual. He casually chatted, "One is to boost my defense or substitution abilities, while the other is to handle undead creatures. However, I'll need to think about the latter later."
The former addressed his lack of physical defense, while the latter made up for his insufficient means to deal with Wraiths and undead creatures.
"Substitution abilities..." Franca said, smiling. "Just sign a contract with a Wraith or specter formed by a Demoness or a Mid-Sequence Seer Beyonder after their death."
Lumian scoffed.
"Do you think I haven't considered that? However, apart from the Demoness evil spirit suspected to be a Saint, there's nothing related to Demonesses or Seers. I definitely can't handle the negative effects of a demigod contractor at my current level."
"Maybe it's manageable," Franca's eyes sparkled. "Maybe the adverse effects will only change your gender."
"What do you mean 'only'?" Lumian wanted to tease Franca for her "life is short, why not give it a shot" mindset, but he restrained himself in front of Jenna.
Franca suddenly had a thought. "Can you only sign contracts with spirit world creatures or strange creatures? Can you sign one with a human? I can share the Mirror Substitution ability with you."
This was the first time Lumian had considered this question. After thinking for a moment, he said, "The relevant mysticism knowledge doesn't forbid it... But never mind. The Inevitability contract might have some hidden corruption or influence."
"That's true." Franca was still rational.
As she responded, another question popped into her mind.
If I actually sign a contract with him, what kind of negative effects will I inflict on Lumian?
"Why does the ability to deal with the undead have to wait?" Jenna wasn't as quick-witted as Franca, so she could only focus on more practical matters.
Lumian chuckled. "Because spirit world creatures and strange creatures fear sunlight's purification and don't have similar abilities, I can only consider obtaining it from the death domain. There's a good contract target there."
"Armored Shadow?" Franca realized. "Are you worried that giving him too much gold will make future communication uncontrollable?"
Lumian nodded and replied,"Additionally, I'm also waiting for the Sealed Artifact made from the Hisoka Beyonder characteristic. If it's related to a Wraith, I won't need the corresponding contract

ability."
After chatting for a while, Lumian reconstructed the wall of spirituality and began his second summoning.
This time, he summoned: "A peculiar creature wandering above the world, an unimaginably sturdy being, a colossal creature that never rests."
After reciting the incantation, a "peak" made of layers of flesh appeared at the mysterious door.
Its height was unknown, but it couldn't fully emerge, causing the illusory and mysterious door to shake.
After speaking the Mystical Language of Fate, Lumian obtained the corresponding information.
This "mountain of flesh" indeed possessed the ability to enhance one's defense. It could toughen one's body to be like steel or rock, but the corresponding downside was having a movement speed as slow as that of an ordinary turtle.
Lumian had no choice but to give up.
His alternative target was his messenger, Penitent Baynfel.
According to the messenger information provided by Madam Magician, Baynfel had the ability to bring his shadow to life and switch positions with his body at critical moments.

Chapter 711: Choice

Since he was summoning his messenger, Lumian didn't perform the ritual in Mr. Fool's name. He simply called forth Penitent Baynfel, who was garbed in a black clergyman's robe, resembling a charred corpse with black flames clinging to his body.

"I wish to enter into another contract with you," Lumian requested with a smile.

He briefly recounted the power of Inevitability, the special contract, the sharing of abilities, the potential price, and the negative effects, awaiting Baynfel's decision.

Baynfel stayed silent for a few moments before responding in a deep voice, "If you're not worried about the downsides, I have no objections."

"What might the negative effects be?" Lumian inquired cautiously.

In Baynfel's empty, dark eye sockets, the dark flames that served as his eyes flickered twice.

"That hinges on your choice. I can let you finalize the contract. Once you know the specific negative effects, you can decide if you want to seal the deal."

Different choices lead to different negative effects? *What choices?* Lumian spoke the Mystical Language of Fate, filled with curiosity and puzzlement, allowing the silver-black symbols, words, and patterns to land on the faux goatskin, forming a short, powerful, mysterious, and sinister contract document.

Through the connection forged by the Mystical Language of Fate, Lumian sensed Baynfel's traits and abilities.

The Penitent's powers were intimately tied to shadows and darkness, but most of them seemed to be submerged in murky depths. Lumian could sense their presence, but he couldn't discern their nature.

The two abilities floating above the surface were Shadow Animation and Spirit World Traversal. Their characteristics were Ancient Corpse.

Perfect, Shadow Animation is just what I need... Baynfel probably showcased it specifically for me... He's quite unique, completely different from spirit world entities like Headless Bride, Abscessed Hand, and Human-Faced Mantis... It's much more straightforward to truly communicate with him... As Lumian mused, he gained a deeper understanding of Shadow Animation.

This was an active ability that could animate the shadows of oneself and others. The former could be used to swap places with the body and evade fatal damage when dodging was impossible. The latter would ensnare the corresponding target, hindering their

movements, but it couldn't inflict much harm or completely restrain the opponent.
Activating it swiftly to produce instantaneous effects was its greatest strength. Otherwise, it couldn't shield from death or injury. Its drawback was that it could only maintain the activation of one shadow at a time.
As a substitute, if the animated shadow perished, Lumian would have to wait for the sun to rise or set before the shadow would reappear. Shadowless individuals would be deathly afraid of sunlight and instinctively dread it.
In the past, my emotions and desires were volatile, and now I'm piling on a fear of sunlight? If I really run into Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Sun pathway in the future, won't I be too terrified to even open my eyes? Thankfully, this is a downside that only kicks in after losing the shadow substitute. It's not permanent... Lumian looked at Baynfel and asked sincerely, "What sacrifice do you require? Or rather, what price must I pay?"
So far, he still hadn't figured out the negative repercussions of signing a contract with Baynfel.
Penitent Baynfel, with only a thin layer of charred skin clinging to his bones, replied, "Any mystical item in your possession."
Any one... *Is this the so-called choice?* Picking a mystical item to offer directly shapes the ultimate negative effects? Lumian had an epiphany as he took stock of the mystical items he carried.
His knee-jerk thought was the Pride Armor. After all, he couldn't effectively use the Sealed Artifact at present. However, looking at Baynfel's charred corpse, he felt that he wasn't just sacrificing an item but attempting to off his messenger. Furthermore, while he couldn't use the Pride Armor for now, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony could. Lumian had already taught them the corresponding usage techniques.
At the crux of it all was a single mantra: Don't wear it yourself. Only utilize the negative effects by letting the target trigger them!
As for proactively triggering higher-level negative effects in exchange for indiscriminate area-of-effect damage, there was no way to teach that. It had to be improvised based on the environment and the enemy's traits. After all, Demonesses likely relished this method. It was brutally effective in bullying targets without substitute-type abilities!
Mystery Prying Glasses, Flog boxing gloves, Eye of Truth, Lie earring, Mr. K's finger, Symphony of Hatred bone flute, Fury of the Sea brooch, Traveler's Bag, Omebella's umbilical cord remains, expired misfortune gold coins and unlucky banknotes, Serial Killer Beyonder characteristic... Lumian went through these items one

by one.
Excluding non-mystical items and ones that were very handy to him at the moment, Lumian ultimately decided to choose between the Mystery Prying Glasses and the Eye of Truth.
Their abilities overlapped to a degree. Keeping one sufficed.
After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian opted to offer the Eye of Truth to Baynfel.
He believed that the Mystery Prying Glasses had fewer negative effects than the Eye of Truth when usage time was limited. Furthermore, the Eye of Truth could only see the truth. The Mystery Prying Glasses could at least be used to paint supernatural works and disguise himself. After Lumian became an Ascetic, he could effectively rein in the urge to paint while donning the Mystery Prying Glasses. He could paint as needed or abstain.
Lumian produced the peculiar Eye of Truth and handed it to Baynfel.
Just as Baynfel grasped the eyewear, which appeared entwined with flesh and blood vessels, Lumian suddenly sensed the downside of signing the contract.
In scenes closely tied to Baynfel's past, he would witness truths better left unseen.
However, it's fine if such effects only happen when it involves this messenger's enigmatic background. Otherwise, I would have cut today's ritual short and made a new choice after finding a suitable contract partner... In Aurore and Franca's words, seeing what shouldn't be seen is a death sentence... Lumian pondered for a moment and replied to Baynfel in a deep voice, "The contract stands."
As he finished speaking, the short and sinister contract spontaneously ignited without fire, transforming into silver-black symbols, words, and patterns that seared onto Lumian's arm.
Lumian glanced down at his shadow and saw it warp on its own, as if performing a powerful dance.
A smile spread across Lumian's face.
After about ten seconds, his shadow settled.
Lumian expressed his gratitude to Baynfel and ended the summoning, stowing away all the items on the altar.
"It's done?" Franca asked eagerly.
It wasn't that she doubted Lumian couldn't even handle his messenger, but she worried the nature of his abilities might not meet the requirements or come with too many strings attached.
Lumian nodded and briefly recounted the situation with Shadow Animation.
As he walked towards the quarry cave's exit, he said to Franca,

Jenna, and Anthony, "Now, we can hatch a plan to deal with Moran Avigny.
"Franca, contact the Demoness of Black and let her know we're about to make our move. However, to avoid spooking the family and hidden forces behind Moran Avigny, she doesn't need to observe nearby for now. Just request an emergency help charm from her that can contact her through a mirror if the Mirror People have hidden allies. Yes, it's a golden opportunity to test the Demoness of Black's stance towards the Tamara family and the Mirror People. Also, inform the Eternal Blazing Sun Church that they can get ready to cut us some slack.
"Jenna, write to Madam Judgment and clue her in on our plan in the event the Demoness of Black is in bed with the Mirror People.
"Anthony..."
Lumian's mind raced as he considered various details and doled out missions to his companions.
Franca, Jenna, and Anthony didn't just passively accept their tasks. They actively chimed in with ideas and helped Lumian fill in gaps and polish his brainstorming.
Upon returning to Apartment 702 at 9 Rue Orosai, Anthony ducked out early to keep up appearances at the Trier Psychiatrist Guild. Jenna, meanwhile, changed into a dark black cloaked dress and seized the chance to play the part of a Witch.
Soon, only Lumian and Franca remained in the apartment's living room.
The atmosphere grew awkward, and a prolonged silence hung in the air.
Lumian broke the ice as if nothing had happened.
"How's Jenna coming along with digesting the Witch potion?"
Franca breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Not bad. She's found her groove acting as a Witch. Ask around the market district and you'll hear whispers of Witches appearing in the dead of night to punish rowdy drunkards. Some claim to have fallen into an icy river. Some wake up the next day aching all over, while others get splitting headaches come evening and don't dare drink anymore. What they have in common is they all ran into someone dressed as a Witch. Yes, some drunkards even vanished into thin air..."
Franca's voice trailed off, replaced by a tone fit for telling ghost stories.
"The missing ones committed serious offenses? The others are guilty of beating their families, harassing passersby, and groping women?" Lumian guessed with a smile, based on his read of Jenna.
"Bingo." Franca nodded with a bright smile.

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, "Aren't you worried the Demoness of Black will catch wind of this rumor and send someone to investigate?"
Franca felt smug and pointed at herself.
"You're looking at her! Me! In the Demoness Sect, I'm the one handling matters tied to the market district!"
She then sighed and said, "Jenna is a natural. She whipped up a solid acting plan in under a month. Maybe she can digest the Witch potion before I advance to Affliction."
"If those incidents hadn't happened, she would've been a star actress. Acting is second nature to her," Lumian agreed.
The two fell silent again.
After a few seconds, Franca put on a brave face and said, "Um, um, you can't breathe a word to Jenna or anyone else about what I said or did near the altar in the mirror world!"
Lumian asked in confusion, "Did you say or do anything out of the ordinary back there?
"I don't recall..."
Franca was taken aback for a moment before flashing an understanding smile.
She stood up with a breezy grin and walked to Lumian's side. She patted his shoulder gratefully and said, "What a bro!"
She felt all the awkwardness had evaporated.
...
A few days later, as Moran Avigny attended an interministerial meeting, Lumian appeared near the government-provided villa.

Chapter 712: "Accusation"

Lumian stood beside Moran Avigny's villa, wearing a wide-brimmed round hat and a black tweed coat. He gazed at the garden, its few withered leaves rustling in the breeze, and said to Franca, "Keep your distance later."

As he spoke, Lumian's eyes turned silver-black once more, allowing him to observe the fate tributaries corresponding to Franca's future.

The tributary tainted with a faint black color was unrelated to their upcoming infiltration. Given the current circumstances, sneaking into Moran Avigny's villa and leaving a Mirror Mark on the full-body mirror in his study didn't seem to pose a high risk of death.

However, Lumian knew better than to let his guard down. After using the Eye of Calamity several times, he understood that a single black fate tributary didn't necessarily mean there was only one hidden death calamity lurking.

According to Franca, numerous death calamities were concealed further along the fate tributary, too blurry for Lumian to discern or differentiate.

In other words, even though there was presently just one faintly black-tainted fate tributary connected to their infiltration of Moran Avigny's villa, when Franca made her decision and tried to enter, transforming the harmless fate tributary into the main path, a black tributary symbolizing a deadly calamity might still emerge.

Lumian's profound realization about this was: The fate of the future was variable and ever-evolving.

Of course, certain aspects were destined to remain constant. For instance, death was the inevitable fate awaiting most humans.

"No need to worry, I'm not new to this," Franca assured him, confident in her infiltration skills.

Assassin 101: Infiltration!

Without another word, Lumian activated the mark and morphed into a shadow creature, melding into the shadows cast by the garden's plants.

Franca stepped forward and disappeared into the wind-stirred shadows.

The pair swiftly and stealthily made their way to the side of the villa.

At the same time, Moran Avigny was attending a ministerial meeting. His wife had gone to an art salon with her lady's maid, leaving only a handful of valets, maids, gardeners, and chefs in

the villa.
The Avigny family didn't live there. Only the immediate family of the Minister of Industry was permitted to reside in the government-provided villa long-term. Moran Avigny's three children had either already married and moved out or were attending university in the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. They only returned home on weekends.
For Lumian and Franca, this was when the target location's security was at its most vulnerable. After all, Moran Avigny was the VIP. The covert protection detail would undoubtedly stick close to him.
Lumian emerged from the shadows in the corner and instructed Franca,
"Wait here and keep an eye out for any trouble."
"Got it!" Franca agreed without protest.
Lumian concentrated on the Demoness of Pleasure's fate tributary for a few moments before shifting back into a shadow creature and silently slipping into Moran Avigny's villa.
He couldn't view his own future fate, even with the aid of a mirror. His only option was to infer his fate by watching his companions.
Franca concealed herself in the shadows and patiently waited.
It wasn't long before Lumian reached Moran Avigny's study, navigating it as if it were his own home. He had witnessed Moran Avigny use the full-body mirror there to access the mirror world on multiple occasions.
As for his familiarity with the layout, that was thanks to the detailed security map provided by 007.
The winter sunlight around 4 p.m. was dim. The study was a mix of light and darkness, evoking a strong sense of dusk. The silence had long been a constant melody in this space.
Lumian meticulously searched the study from within the shadows but found no traps or hidden individuals.
Only then did he revert to his human form, breaking free from the shadows and reappearing in front of the full-body mirror.
As the black mark activated, Lumian reached out his right palm and pressed it against the cold, hard glass.
A blood-colored handprint instantly materialized, reversed from Lumian's right palm as if it belonged to someone else.
The inverted, sinister blood-colored palm print quickly faded, blending into the mirror and vanishing.
Just as Lumian was about to pull his right palm back and leave, a hand abruptly extended from the full-body mirror and seized his wrist.
The hand was a healthy white, with long, powerful fingers.

It yanked with tremendous force, catching Lumian off guard and sending him crashing into the glass mirror.
At some point, the mirror had turned ethereal, shedding its corporeal form. Lumian's vision went dark before illuminating to reveal numerous dark passageways resembling a spiderweb.
In the area corresponding to the current mirror, an ordinary-looking man stood at the edge. He raised his brass revolver, aimed it at Lumian, and pulled the trigger.
Clad in a dark tweed suit and a half top hat, with a glass-like cufflink fastened to his sleeve, he wore a faint smile, as if mocking Lumian for not anticipating the possibility of Moran Avigny's bodyguard hiding in the mirror.
Bang!
A bullet gleaming with ghostly green light shot towards Lumian.
Lumian's figure abruptly vanished. The bullet struck the afterimage he left behind and flew into one of the dark, empty tunnels.
In the next instant, Lumian swiftly materialized behind the ambusher and, without hesitation, harrumphed.
Two beams of white light shot out from his nose and struck the ambusher.
The ambusher's eyes snapped shut, and he crumpled to the ground.
Midway through, his eyes darted around and he snapped out of his daze.
Thud! He crashed to the ground, transforming his body into a shadow.
The shadows disintegrated and spread in all directions, entering various dark tunnels.
Immediately after, the ambusher stealthily materialized in an empty passageway, his form shrouded in faint white fog.
Lumian's figure was reflected in his misty eyes. Before Lumian could sense it and turn to look, the ambusher spoke in a strange language that could stir the forces of nature, "You're guilty!"
Lumian had never encountered this language, but he clearly understood its meaning. His body suddenly froze, as if under an invisible restriction.
The ambusher opened his mouth again.
"You blasphemer!"
Suddenly, the entire mirror world froze, and the dark, ethereal passageways transformed into tiny amber insects.
Once again, Lumian heard a terrifying voice that seemed to come from an infinite distance.
Vaguely, he "saw" three figures.

The three figures sat cross-legged, one facing left, one looking straight ahead, and the other looking right. Their hands were in different postures.
One was heavy, one real, and one ethereal. They were in three different states, constantly moving, changing, and interchanging around a silver circle.
A majestic and resounding voice reverberated, causing Lumian's mind to buzz as he lost consciousness.
Amidst the blurry, vivid pain, the dazed Lumian felt a familiar burning sensation on his left chest. His right palm alternated between burning and freezing.
Gradually, he regained consciousness.
In a dark tunnel that had solidified, the ambusher witnessed silver-black warts erupting from Lumian's body, emitting sinister patterns that resembled viscous liquid. At some point, a strange, cold wind swept through the surroundings. Darkness squirmed in the depths of the different tunnels, as if a monster was about to crawl out.
The ambusher's body stiffened, becoming increasingly sluggish, with a faint white fog barely discernible within.
After an unknown period of time, the man finally survived the most dangerous moment. He felt his body again and regained his vision and hearing.
As Lumian's warts and patterns faded, the ambusher instinctively felt a lingering fear.
How did he commit blasphemy?
Which deity did he blaspheme against?
Why didn't he lose control?
I've never encountered such a situation before!
The Beyonder powers possessed by the ambusher allowed him to discern the target's crimes and "accuse" him of various charges. The damage and effects of different crimes were completely different, and the accuser couldn't predict them beforehand. They could only make a guess based on their experience from previous "cases."
This was the first time the ambusher had encountered a situation where he nearly succumbed to the overflowing influence of the deity after the sinner was punished by a deity for blasphemy!
Fortunately, he recovered before the target.
The ambusher raised the brass revolver once more and aimed it at Lumian, who was hunched over in pain.
Just as he pulled the trigger, Lumian's head snapped up, his expression contorted with ferocity.
Bang!

A bullet shimmering with starlight shot out from the muzzle, locked onto the target's body.
Almost simultaneously, Lumian's shadow came to life and flipped upward.
Crack!
The black shadow shattered like a mirror. Along with the starlight, it caved in and was obliterated.
After briefly disappearing, Lumian materialized behind the ambusher and harrumphed once more.
He had used Shadow Animation in time, and the shadow had triggered Franca's Mirror Substitution!
This was why Lumian had Franca infiltrate the villa and stay outside. Relying on Mirror Substitution required maintaining a certain distance.
It turned out his shadow could also share Mirror Substitution!
Two beams of white light shot out, causing the ambusher to close his eyes again.
This time, Lumian didn't give the enemy a chance to quickly wake up. He extended his right foot and blocked the enemy, preventing him from falling.
Simultaneously, he drew his revolver and pressed it against the target's forehead.
The ambusher's eyes darted around, and he awoke to the terrifying pressure emanating from the muzzle.
He forced a smile, handed over his revolver, and whispered, "I'll give this to you. Can you let me go?"
Lumian's thoughts raced as he took the revolver and nodded. "Okay."
He then holstered his revolver.
The ambusher maintained a humble and ingratiating smile as he turned around and walked deeper into the dark tunnel.
Suddenly, Lumian heard Termiboros's magnificent voice.
"It's best not to let him go."
Uh... Lumian's eyes narrowed as he instantly sensed something was off.
Why did I agree to that deal just now?
Why would I let him go?

Chapter 713: Between White and Black

Warned by Termiboros, Lumian sensed something was off.

The ambusher was slowly making his exit, as if concerned that moving too fast would prematurely alert Lumian to the abnormality. Strangely, no massive vortex emerged from the dark, empty tunnel's depths, stopping the ambusher, who had already gone in, from getting pulled into another mirror.

As he watched him go, Lumian glanced at his restored shadow, put away the brass revolver taken from the enemy, and pulled out the Flog boxing gloves from his Traveler's Bag. He put them on at a measured pace.

A moment later, blazing white flames engulfed Lumian's body as he transformed into a fiery spear that hurtled towards the ambusher's back.

The ambusher's fears came to pass. He quickly evaded, ready to turn into a shadow and escape into the dark tunnel's depths with five decoys. Then he would trigger Mirror Traversal and get away entirely, returning to a pre-selected mirror.

Just then, as the flames making up the burning white spear dissipated, Lumian appeared.

The ambusher's shadow came alive, ensnaring the body that hadn't fully transformed into a shadow, briefly keeping it from dividing into six separate forms. It was forced to remain in place.

Lumian advanced and dashed in front of the terrified ambusher. He alternated punches, starting the Flogging.

Bang!

Lumian's initial punch heightened the ambusher's fear, and the target narrowly freed himself from his shadow's entanglement.

Bang!

Lumian's next punch instantly set off the enemy's already tense fear.

This wasn't chance; the ambusher's fear clearly exceeded normal levels in this situation. Lumian, his eyes silver-black, foresaw the corresponding future and exploited this vulnerability. Fear played out in his mind as he punched.

Thus, the first punch worsened the situation, and the second significantly raised the odds, successfully triggering the fear.

The ambusher went rigid, heart briefly ceasing from the detonating fear. His mind blanked, and blood poured from his nose.

Seeing this, Lumian took out the ritual sheepskin from his Traveler's Bag and threw it over the ambusher's head.

Right after, he spoke the activation incantation in Hermes: "Sheep!"

Amid a dark flash, the ambusher turned into a sheep with light white and gray wool.
Lumian stared at the fearful sheep with bloodshot eyes. Removing the Flog boxing gloves and returning them to his Traveler's Bag, he grinned and said,
"So, you think I'll release you for a measly gun?"
Lumian then stooped down, scooped up the limp sheep, and went back to the mirror in Moran Avigny's study, trying to exit.
Unable to enter or leave mirrors, he wasn't certain he could depart so simply. If not, he would utilize the pre-prepared Mirror Mark and Spirit World Traversal to go directly to the unique, permanent mirror world exit in Underground Trier. Then he would teleport to locate Franca. This would avert any issues behind the mirror.
Lumian's vision faded and brightened as he emerged in Moran Avigny's study with the frightened sheep.
He rushed to the window and warily opened it. Sure enough, Franca had exited the shadows and waited by the small windowsill.
Realizing Lumian's Mirror Substitution had shattered, Franca quickly chose to investigate and check if her partner required aid.
You okay?" Franca whispered.
"We'll discuss it later." Lumian threw her the sheep.
Franca promptly caught the sheep and vanished into the shadows with it.
In no rush to go, Lumian donned gloves and took care of the various traces he had left behind.
Soon, Franca returned, using the Primordial Demoness figurine, her mirror, and Demoness black magic to handle the anti-divination and anti-prophecy part.
...
In an abandoned tunnel close to the permanent mirror world entrance in Underground Trier,
Franca, now fully briefed by Lumian, eyed the quivering sheep and said eagerly, "How should we question it? Should I ready a mechanical typewriter like last time?
"But we've run out of truth serum."
Anthony, sans gold-rimmed glasses and back in veteran garb, gazed at the sheep for a couple seconds before responding, "I'll talk with him."
"Should we step out first?" Jenna asked out of caution.
Anthony agreed with a nod.
"I don't mind you observing, but he'll feel more at ease with less people, facilitating communication."
Concerned our attendance will scare him and impact the

Hypnotism? Lumian spun around pensively and exited the sealed dark tunnel alongside Franca and Jenna.
Soon, the sheep appeared with Anthony, no longer as scared and nervous.
"You may cancel the Animal Creation Spell," Anthony told Lumian, smiling. "He realizes we're acting in his best interest and wishes to assist. Provided we avoid topics that will impact his faith in a deity and directly affect his life, he'll speak honestly and amiably."
The sheep nodded gravely, confirming Anthony's words.
Lumian faced Franca and Jenna, seeing matching emotions in their eyes.
A Hypnotist is truly terrifying!
A Spectator is truly terrifying!
Indeed... Lumian reflected inwardly.
Looking at the sheep, he uttered the Hermes incantation: "His Grace."
With a dark flicker, the sheepskin automatically vanished, and the ambusher materialized before Lumian and the others, half-crouched.
Putting away the sheepskin, Lumian inquired with a smile, "What's your name?"
"Jebus Lata," the ambusher answered nonchalantly, like talking to a buddy.
Holding the carbide lamp, Lumian warmly asked, "Were you guarding Moran Avigny?"
"Yes," Jebus Lata replied frankly. "Mainly to conceal myself behind the mirror and watch the outside. Also to prevent mirror world mishaps and ensure Moran Avigny isn't found out and ambushed when he uses it to do specific things in various locations."
Security is fairly tight. No clear weak points... Franca muttered, taking the lead in displaying her Demoness of Pleasure charm. Grinning, she asked, "Which organization do you belong to?"
Jebus's eyes were drawn to Franca as he reflexively answered,
"The School of Truth."
"Truth?" Lumian arched an eyebrow.
Jebus didn't face him, gaze flitting between the two Demonesses.
"Yes, Truth."
Growing serious, he addressed Franca and Jenna in a proselytizing tone, "What do you believe this world's backdrop is?
Without waiting for the Demonesses' response, he continued, "It's not white or black. Not light or darkness.
"It's the gray between white and black, the mist between light and darkness. It's shadows, flux, and chaos!"
Traits of the corresponding pathway? Well-versed in mysticism,

Lumian thoughtfully switched gears.
"Are you aware of Moran Avigny's identity?"
This was their top priority now.
Jebus nodded casually, as if conversing with a friend.
"I am. He's part of the Tamara family but was swapped with a Mirror Person from Underground Trier."
"Then why collaborate with him still?" Franca probed.
Jebus chuckled.
"Didn't I just say?
"This world's backdrop isn't white or black, but gray. If cooperating with Mirror People lets me reach my aim, why not?"
"What's the School of Truth after?" Lumian swiftly queried.
Jebus peered at Franca's face and lake-blue eyes, stating, "We seek to leverage Moran Avigny and other elites to slowly seize control of Intis's government, letting this nation have order yet shadows, plus a conduit for ordered communication and shadows.
"We honor the law, but that won't stop us from uncovering legal loopholes and employing select methods to settle matters pre-litigation.
"That's our ideology."
Jebus seemed to preach to the Demonesses.
How ambitious... Jenna sighed inwardly.
Smiling, Lumian asked, "Why control the government?"
"To practice and near the truth, a rite to please it," Jebus responded fanatically. "Plus, we must use Intis's government and others to locate three things."
"What three?" Franca inquired curiously.
Jebus gladly obliged her.
"One, clues to fallen heaven. It's in the underground ancient sealed city. Only by controlling Intis's government can we fully unseal it."
Fallen heaven... What's that? Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony shared looks, realizing none had heard the term.
Jebus went on, "Two, Roselle's final mausoleum."
Emperor Roselle's mausoleum? Lumian's pupils widened.
Franca asked eagerly, "Got any clues?"
"I don't know." Jebus shook his head honestly. "At minimum, I've got zero leads on Roselle's tomb. No idea if the Overseers have found anything."
Overseer... Lumian and the rest committed the title to memory.
Jebus glanced from Franca to Jenna, then back to Franca.
"Three, a lamp. The Magic Wishing Lamp."
Magic Wishing Lamp? Lumian checked Franca, seeing the Demoness of Pleasure also looked blank.
Smiling, Jebus added with a showy air, "The Magic Wishing Lamp

is a Sealed Artifact. Its number is: 0-05!"

Chapter 714: The Fractured Tamara Family

Jebus eagerly observed Franca and Jenna after mentioning 0-05, hoping to witness expressions of shock and terror on their faces.
Considering the immense power demonstrated by this Beyonder team, they surely grasped the gravity of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact!
It was a horrifying object capable of obliterating not just Trier, but potentially the whole world!
The higher the serial number of a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact, the more dangerous it would be.
And now, they were talking about 0-05!
While Franca and Jenna were intrigued and surprised, their reaction didn't match Jebus's expectations.
Instead of responding to Jebus, they turned their attention to Lumian.
Despite not having seen or dared to read the details, they had learned from Lumian that Ludwig, the monstrous child, had "stolen" Sealed Artifact information from the Church of Knowledge and given it to Lumian as payment for a deal.
The information pertained to 0-01!
0-05? Lumian raised an eyebrow.
To his knowledge, Sealed Artifacts probably didn't have serial numbers in ancient times. Even if they did, they were individual actions of different Churches. It wasn't until the end of the Fourth Epoch or the beginning of the Fifth Epoch that the seven ruling Churches established the current Sealed Artifact classification rules and numbered the ones under their control.
Among them, due to the immense danger posed by Grade 0 and Grade 1 Sealed Artifacts, the orthodox Churches had agreed to share general information with each other and unify their serial numbers without duplicates.
In other words, it was impossible for both the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Evernight Goddess Church to possess a 0-05 Sealed Artifact.
In the entire world, only the Magic Wishing Lamp could be called 0-05!
When the seven Churches first numbered their Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts, they undoubtedly ranked them according to the level of danger, time of appearance, and intrinsic uniqueness. Subsequent acquisitions would be named in the order they were sealed.
This way, there was a high likelihood that the dozens of Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts at the top of the list would adhere to posing greater danger and having greater uniqueness the lower the serial number. For 0-05 to be ranked fifth among the countless Grade 0

Sealed Artifacts spoke volumes about its terrifying power and significance!
Of course, based on these rules, the Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts with the lowest serial numbers might not necessarily be weaker than those with higher serial numbers.
Lumian looked at Jebus and said in a relatively calm tone, "0-05? A terrifying item ranked fifth among all Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts?"
"Indeed," Jebus replied, his desire to show off finally satisfied.
Lumian inquired curiously, "Does its name, Magic Wishing Lamp, imply that you can make wishes with it?"
At that moment, Lumian's heart swelled with anticipation that surpassed his outward expression.
Jebus nodded solemnly.
"Yes, it can grant the holder any ten wishes."
Before Lumian could probe further, Jebus added, "However, as far as I know, the fulfillment of those wishes often takes a distorted form or comes with horrifying consequences. Moreover, none of those who once possessed the divine lamp met a good end. Perhaps Roselle Gustav met his demise because of this."
Lumian fell silent upon hearing this revelation.
Franca glanced at Lumian and asked, "Did 0-05 once belong to Emperor Roselle?"
Jebus responded without hesitation, "Yes."
Franca inquired with interest, "What about now? Do you have any leads on 0-05's whereabouts?"
Jebus was eager to share what he knew.
"Yes, it should be with the leader of the secret organization, Element Dawn.
"That leader is believed to be Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette."
"Wow!" Franca exclaimed in admiration and relief, as if the child of an old friend was thriving after the latter's passing.
Although she and Lumian had learned after the sea prayer ritual that Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter, Bernadette, was alive and had invented fairytale magic, closely linked to the Tarot Club's Major Arcana card, The Hermit, they were unaware of her precise circumstances.
Now, she was pleasantly surprised to discover that Bernadette had become the leader of a secret organization.
Franca had long been familiar with Element Dawn. She knew they focused on studying mysticism and Beyonder alchemy, opposing another knowledge-seeking secret organization, the Moses Ascetic Order. They were primarily active in the Intis region, the south-central zone, and the sea.
"It's only natural for the Emperor's belongings to be with his eldest

daughter," Lumian remarked, feeling somewhat pleased for Emperor Roselle.
Franca asked Jebus excitedly, "Are you planning to confront Bernadette?"
Jebus slowly shook his head.
"We don't have the necessary strength yet. That's one of the reasons we collaborate with the Mirror People.
"Only by embracing and pleasing the truth can the Overseers obtain more boons to resist Bernadette and her subordinates."
Controlling the government and embracing the truth to varying degrees is a boon-seeking ritual? Yes, Jebus himself mentioned that this is a ritual to please the truth... Their boon-receiving ritual differs from that of other evil god cults. Rather than primarily focusing on blood sacrifices, it emphasizes the influence, utilization, and transformation of order... Lumian summarized a key characteristic of the School of Truth based on Jebus's words.
After a moment of contemplation, he asked, "Overseer is both a position and a name? What's the Sequence equivalent in the potion pathway?"
"Sequence 4, having just attained godhood," Jebus replied concisely. It was unclear whether he was reluctant to disclose such matters or if he simply didn't know much.
Lumian continued, "We've already grasped your school's philosophy and objectives. What's the purpose of the Mirror People?"
Jebus pondered for a moment before responding, "They also want to break the seal of the ancient underground city. Only by breaking the seal can they enter the depths of the special mirror world where they originally resided and find something of great importance, but it has nothing to do with us.
"They've been allowing more Mirror People to sneak out and replace the originals.
"I'm not sure if they have any other motives."
"Apart from Moran Avigny, which other Mirror People do you know?" Franca didn't conceal her desire to know the answer.
Jebus shook his head.
"Ever since we reached a collaborative agreement with Moran Avigny, he's had the other Mirror People change their positions and identities. He's the only one who can contact them."
"How did you discover that Moran Avigny is a Mirror Person?" Lumian sought additional clues.
Jebus chuckled.
"Our School of Truth was founded with some members of the

Tamara family as its core. Several of them had long suspected that something was off with Moran Avigny and other clansmen. After receiving the truth's revelation, they confirmed this suspicion."
"Which pathway does Moran Avigny's original body belong to?" Lumian frowned.
Jebus didn't conceal anything for Moran Avigny's sake.
"The Judgment pathway. Not only does he possess the power of the Judgment pathway, but he can also wield mirror-related powers."
"Are there any members of the Tamara family's Judgment lineage who don't follow the truth and aren't replaced by Mirror People?" Lumian inquired further.
"Yes, they've cut ties with our School of Truth and have been trying to deal with us," Jebus replied truthfully.
Wh— The Tamara family first split into two branches, Judgment and Apprentice. Then, the Judgment branch splintered into three parts: those who believe in the truth, those replaced by the Mirror People, and those who adhered to their original traditions... However, the ones with the connection between the Apprentice branch of the Tamara family and the Demoness Sect are more likely to be replaced by the Mirror People. Has that branch also fractured? Why is the Tamara family constantly splintering... Even if the Tamara family doesn't fracture, there's still the risk of being replaced by the Mirror People? Could this stem from some unresolved mysteries of the Fourth Epoch? Lumian analyzed and speculated based on the available information.
"What's Moran Avigny's approximate Sequence?" Jenna asked, noticing Lumian's silence.
"Sequence 5," Jebus answered Jenna's question with a smile.
Sequence 5 Disciplinary Paladin... Franca, under the guidance of Madam Judgment, a Major Arcana card holder, was well-versed in the Arbiter pathway.
Sequence 9 was Arbiter, Sequence 8 was Sheriff, Sequence 7 was Interrogator, and Sequence 6 was Judge.
Disciplinary Paladin with mirror magic and mirror world-related abilities... Lumian looked at Jebus and asked with a smile,
"You're not a Mirror Person or a Demoness. Why can you freely enter and exit the mirror world without being affected by the dangers there?"
Jebus pointed at the glass cufflink on his sleeve.
"This is an item given to us by Moran Avigny. It allows us to enter and exit the mirror world and use the connections between mirrors to traverse without being absorbed into other mirrors.
"I can still use it five times."
Very good. It will be ours in the future... Yes, let's call them Mirror

Cufflink... At that moment, Franca had already thought of a name for the cufflink.
Lumian nodded and replied, "If your abilities correspond to a potion pathway, what would Sequence 9 be called?"
Given the looming potential conflict with the School of Truth, Lumian didn't let the opportunity to understand the other party's Beyonder powers slip away.
A proud smile graced Jebus's face. "It's Broker. We are the gray between white and black, the fog between light and darkness. We are the bridge between order and shadows!"
"Could you say something more comprehensible..." Franca muttered under her breath.
Lumian smiled and asked without hesitation, "What abilities does Broker possess?"

Chapter 715: Shadow Merchant

Jebus reorganized his thoughts and said, "We can become more attuned to certain needs and find suitable candidates to fulfill them. We can also facilitate the corresponding transactions through our words and connections."

With his Conspirer's mind, Lumian pondered seriously for two seconds before fully grasping Jebus's true meaning. Amused, he said, "Put it in simpler terms that are closer to mysticism."

Jebus glanced at Franca and Jenna and eagerly explained, "I have two primary abilities. One is called Gray Perception. I can more acutely sense the gray areas between white and black, including my desire and need to enter that gray domain.

"The other is exceptional eloquence. This includes mastery of language and the ability to observe others' expressions and decipher their words."

"That's it?" Lumian asked, raising his eyebrows.

"That's it," Jebus replied candidly with a shake of his head.

"Don't Brokers charge fees for their services?" Lumian inquired with a smile.

"Before reaching a deal, we will agree on a price with both parties. Sometimes, we don't even ask for one. It's mainly to establish and maintain relationships," Jebus answered seriously. "None of this involves any superpowers."

I had thought a Broker's Beyonder powers could derive corresponding benefits from every transaction they facilitate, including Beyonder enhancements. However, this is clearly an exaggeration. It doesn't seem to belong to Sequence 9... The two abilities Jebus mentioned are very fitting for those at Sequence 9. From the looks of it, Brokers and Spectators are quite similar. They can hardly participate directly in Beyonder battles and are considered more supplementary support... Lumian nodded in enlightenment.

Franca asked with interest, "What's Sequence 8?"

"It's Shadow Merchant," Jebus replied with a smile as he gazed at the Demoness of Pleasure's face.

Without waiting for Franca to inquire further, he took the initiative to explain, "We can detect mysterious creatures and dangerous entities hidden in darkness and shadow while remaining safe from their attacks, thereby allowing us to reach certain deals with them."

Jenna couldn't help but ask, "Invulnerable to hidden mysterious creatures and dangerous entities?"

Isn't this ability too powerful?

Jebus replied with a smile, "That's usually the case, but you can't attack the other party first or secretly exert any influence that's disadvantageous to them. You can't harbor malice when striking a deal, lest the other party discovers it. Furthermore, you'll suffer indiscriminate damage if embroiled in a battlefield. You can't make creatures engaged in combat stand down."
"What if you see something you shouldn't?" Lumian asked after some thought.
"I will endure the corresponding corruption," Jebus answered without attempting to boast.
"So it seems a Shadow Merchant possesses an aura that prevents nearby creatures from harboring malice towards them?" Franca realized.
Jebus praised, "Madame, your summary is better than mine. However, it's not that you don't generate malice at all, but that you reduce their malice to a certain extent. The higher the other party's level, the weaker the effect. In other words, interacting with those mysterious creatures and dangerous entities to reach a deal is still risky and requires courage."
At this point, Jebus chuckled.
"Taking risks is a necessary quality for successful merchants."
"From the looks of it, you embody that?" Lumian deliberately provoked.
"Of course," Jebus replied proudly. "I've made deals with many dangerous creatures and obtained valuable items. Then, through new deals, I used them to exchange for more useful items from believers of the Great Mother, the Mother Tree of Desire, and other Beyonders. These include bullets that can absorb life, bullets that cause a target's implosion, and bullets that can impregnate a human, among other things."
Bullets that can impregnate a human... Lumian was suddenly traumatized. He was grateful he hadn't given Jebus a chance to fire that bullet.
Franca and Jenna felt an inexplicable fear, their bodies turning cold. Even Anthony's expression shifted slightly.
Jebus's gaze swept across Franca, Jenna, Lumian, and his friend Anthony. He said solemnly,
"Using our connections with various creatures, we Shadow Merchants can assist you in obtaining anything you desire, as long as you pay a sufficient price.
"Of course, we can't guarantee success in every transaction."
"I want the Sequence 4 potion formula of the Hunter pathway," Lumian said with a smile.
Jebus fell silent for a moment before saying, "It will take an

extremely long time to find someone who can provide the corresponding formula through multiple intermediaries.
"The one who ultimately makes the deal with you might even pose a danger to you."
Lumian had only been joking. He deliberately sighed and said, "Then let's put that aside for now.
"What other abilities does a Shadow Merchant possess? Your abilities can't be limited to just reducing the malice of surrounding creatures and detecting hidden entities."
Jebus finally met Lumian's gaze.
"I've used some of them in my battles with you, including concealing myself in shadows, transforming into a shadow, and creating fake shadows. They're more protective abilities. I collectively call them 'Shadow Utilization.'"
Franca sighed with emotion. "Shadow Merchants can utilize not only symbolic shadows, but also shadows in reality."
Encouraged, Jebus continued, "We can also sign contracts with the shadows of both parties as witnesses, directly connected to each other's souls. If we violate the contract, the shadows will harm our spirits. It's like a powerful curse."
"I see..." Franca recalled the fellow she had encountered earlier.
The man, who also appeared to be a member of the School of Truth, had mentioned that he had a way to ensure the binding power of contracts on both parties.
"And then?" Jenna pressed.
Jebus suddenly felt a little embarrassed. He coughed twice and said, "We can also rely on symbolic shadow power to secretly modify key terms the moment the contract is signed, making the other party offer more or less."
"No wonder..." Franca finally understood how the man suspected of being a member of the School of Truth had deceived her and Jenna.
No wonder he had revealed an abnormality once she mentioned divining the contract in advance!
Shadow Merchants are well-suited for dealing with Beyonders of the Marauder pathway. I wonder which side will ultimately suffer... Lumian didn't give Franca a chance to criticize the Shadow Merchant. He chuckled and questioned, "What about Sequence 7?"
"Sequence 7 is Prosecutor," Jebus introduced, as if trying to compensate for the Shadow Merchant's dark image. "A Prosecutor has two abilities. One allows them to discern a target's crimes, but they can't witness the process. The other is based on the first ability. First, declare the other party guilty, then point out the specific crime..."

Franca turned puzzled.
"How can this crime be determined?
"It can't be based on Intis law, can it? If we meet in the Loen Kingdom, won't your abilities be useless?
"Do they automatically adapt to local laws?"
This seemed to be the first time Jebus had been asked this question. After more than ten seconds of thought, he replied,
"It's likely an act recognized as a crime by most humans. It includes blasphemy, murder, rape, fraud, theft, and so on. Nothing more detailed or categorized."
Franca remained unconvinced. "That's not right either. Suppose we enter a ridiculous world where we can do whatever we want, including murder and blasphemy. Wouldn't that prevent you from declaring the target guilty?"
She was thinking of the recently concluded Dream Festival.
Jebus fell silent for a moment before responding, "I don't know..."
"Perhaps the charges stem from something more fundamental," Lumian speculated.
Jebus couldn't be certain.
Franca could only look at him and say, "Continue."
Jebus took a moment to recall where he had left off.
"After pointing out the crime, the target will receive the corresponding punishment from the world itself or some entity. The exact punishment depends on the severity of the target's crime. We can't know in advance. In short, from my experience, the most terrifying punishments are immediate death and loss of control on the spot.
"In addition, for ongoing crimes, we can directly declare the target guilty. There's no need to specify the charges, effectively saving time."
Franca nodded slightly, gaining a new understanding of the battle.
"What language did you use when you announced the charge?" Lumian recalled the corresponding details.
"It's the Words of Order. I automatically learned it when I received the Prosecutor's boon," Jebus confessed.
Lumian offered a curt acknowledgment. "What about Sequence 6?"
"It's the Ambitionist," Jebus said, his eyes seeming to blaze with flames. "An inexhaustible ambition brings about a powerful physique, keen perception, and outstanding spirituality, driving us to constantly pursue improvements in our combat abilities. And our burning ambitions make us unwilling to rest for a moment. Unless we're prepared to sleep, no one can force us to sleep or faint..."
"In other words, it can effectively resist being forced into dreams,

comas, and other debilitating states? Or is it outright immunity?"
Lumian immediately understood why Jebus could wake up so quickly when facing the Spell of Harrumph.
"It's resistance," Jebus admitted candidly.
Lumian inquired further about Ambitionists before asking, "You should be at Sequence 5, right?"
"Yes." Jebus puffed out his chest in front of the two Demonesses.
Franca asked curiously, "What's Sequence 5?"
Jebus replied with a smile, "It's Under the Table."
Under the Table? Franca, Lumian, and the others simultaneously thought of the Authority Holder's Under-the-
table Transaction they had obtained from General Philip.
Could it be formed by the power of a Sequence 5 boon of the Broker pathway?
Lumian gazed at Jebus, in no hurry to comprehend the hidden box's abilities. He asked thoughtfully, "What's your connection to the Carbonari?"

Chapter 716: Bullets

Jebus, who had been about to explain the meaning of "Under the Table," was caught off guard.

"We're putting in a lot of effort to keep the Carbonari in check and have made considerable headway."

The School of Truth member chuckled at that.

"They're attempting to topple the government and create their own system. That's precisely the outcome we hope to see."

Jenna thought Jebus's words didn't add up. "But don't you aim to slowly seize control of the government through high society individuals like Moran Avigny?"

Jebus laughed and adopted an instructive tone.

"A wise merchant wouldn't risk everything on a single venture. The same principle applies to exceptional Ambitionists."

Hearing this, Lumian abruptly shifted the topic.

"From what you've described, Ambitionists primarily enhance their bodies, perception, and spirituality. It doesn't appear to involve their intellect?"

Before Jebus could reply, Franca responded with a grin.

"Who says Ambitionists require intelligence? It's not the same as being a Conspirer. Ambitionists prioritize ambition over the capability to actually achieve it. Exceptional intelligence isn't a prerequisite for them. We've encountered many foolish ambitionists throughout history."

The pair's back-and-forth left Jebus speechless.

Fortunately, Lumian didn't dwell on the subject. He turned the conversation back to the Carbonari.

"Has Albert Goncourt already sided with you?"

"Most likely," Jebus answered uncertainly. "I don't handle the Carbonari."

"Was it because of you Brokers that the Dreamseekers charity group formed ties with the Carbonari?" Lumian thought of General Philip.

Jebus grinned again. "Philip was a man with grand aspirations who had long aimed to bring various secret organizations together. As Brokers, Shadow Merchants, and Ambitionists, we definitely had to help him. Regrettably, while his scheme was successful, others took advantage of him. He also disappeared in the ancient underground city. Incidentally, I'm not sure if you know, but it's actually Fourth Epoch Trier."

"You guys..." Franca had a thought but kept it to herself. She merely sighed.

Only then did Lumian inquire about Under the Table. "What extra

capabilities do you gain at Sequence 5?"
Jebus kept his eyes fixed on the two Demonesses.
"Under the Table is the sole ability, but there are two ways to utilize it:
"The first is to establish an unseen and tranquil Under the Table atmosphere in combat and emergency scenarios. You can forcibly meet your demands by offering the enemy valuable items, but you can't injure them or impact their state in any other way. Additionally, you must behave normally. If not, the enemy who 'agreed' to the under-the-table deal can easily detect that something is amiss and snap out of it.
"Such Under the Table transactions aren't guaranteed to work. The target's inclination and experience in the gray domain determine the success rate. The Broker Sequence's Gray Perception ability can assess this. If you're up against an Unshadowed of the Sun pathway, success is nearly impossible even without the suppression of godhood."
Unshadowed referred to the Sun pathway's Sequence 4.
Lumian had a realization. "You previously made me release you through such an Under the Table transaction?"
"Correct," Jebus said frankly. "You have extensive experience with the gray domain and a strong inclination in that respect."
On Lumian's behalf, Franca complimented Jebus, saying, "You have a talent for reading people!"
"Gray Perception may be an ability acquired as a Sequence 9 Broker, but it's incredibly useful," Jebus bragged, seeming objective.
Jenna pressed, "And the other Under the Table transaction?"
Jebus answered with a smile, "That requires a certain amount of time. It's not suitable for combat or emergency situations.
"In simple terms, we'll utilize a barely sealed space as the operating target to create a genuine Under the Table scenario. We'll be on one side of the transaction under this table. The mysterious creature or dangerous entity concealed in the shadows and darkness will be on the other side, but we won't know their identity beforehand. We also won't be able to sense who the other party is during the transaction. It could be an entity we've previously dealt with or one from the unknown.
"Essentially, in this Under the Table state, where you don't know the counter-party or how your needs will be fulfilled through the transaction, you can achieve the desired result by stating your request and offering the item the other party desires. How this is accomplished isn't relevant."
"Can the transaction only involve two parties?" Jenna asked inquisitively.

"No, it can be a three-way deal, a four-way deal, or even more. Just follow the Under the Table transaction rules." Jebus didn't hold back on sharing his mysticism knowledge. "The transaction may not succeed either. It depends on the task's difficulty and the limitations of the provided traded items. Also, don't assume those mysterious creatures and dangerous entities will honor their promises. There's no lack of con artists among them who can find ways to circumvent Under the Table's restrictions."
"Are there additional risks after using Under the Table to complete a particularly challenging task?" Jenna thought of her Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.
Jebus nodded gravely.
"Yes, it depends on which mysterious creature or dangerous entity helped you and if it has malicious intentions. I once had a week of misfortune and was almost caught by the Purifiers."
Jenna nodded pensively and pondered inwardly: It seems the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction is a variant of the standard Under the Table ability. Instead of the counter-party making the requests, it's us offering something valuable. However, it can only simplify complex issues and ease difficult ones. It can't directly complete tasks. There are significant limitations...
The cost of using it is encountering a transaction involving Demons and other sinister beings...
"What information do you have about Overseers?" Lumian posed a new question when he noticed the Under the Table discussion was nearly over.
Jebus appeared troubled and didn't answer.
Seeing this, Lumian switched topics. "What items are you carrying?"
Jebus glanced at Franca and took out a few assorted items from his concealed pocket.
"This is a healing agent obtained from the Great Mother's believers. These are the Coma Gas, Awakening Gas, and Confession Concoction acquired from the Mother Tree of Desire's followers..."
Healing agents, sedatives, mysticism smelling salts, and truth serum. These are all precious items... Lumian gave a small nod at the four metal canisters with various labels.
His gaze then moved to Jebus's other palm, where six bullets rested.
The six bullets were brass, but their surface patterns and colors differed. One looked normal, one had a luminous tip, and one appeared to be corroded by potent acid. One flickered with a dark green light, one radiated a brilliant starlight, and another had a faint luster as if it had been matted many times.

Jebus introduced them with enthusiasm, "These are the Impregnating Bullet, Poison Bullet, Putrid Bullet, Weakening Bullet, Implosion Bullet, and Deprivation Bullet. I traded for them from various deity believers."
Intrigued, Franca pointed at the ordinary bullet from a distance. "Is this the Impregnating Bullet?"
"Indeed. People and animals shot by it will inevitably become pregnant, and the corresponding symptoms will swiftly manifest," Jebus said, a tinge of fear in his voice.
"It affects both males and females indiscriminately?" Franca inquired.
"Yes," Jebus said with certainty.
Huh... Franca made a sound conveying a mix of contempt, fear, and fascination.
Jenna asked worriedly, "It looks like a regular bullet. What if there's a mix-up?"
Jebus shook his head.
"You won't make that mistake. It's lightweight, as if made of wood or soil."
Phew... Lumian and Anthony let out a sigh of relief.
Lumian pointed at the matte bullet. "Is this the Deprivation Bullet? What does it do?"
The effects of the other bullets seemed straightforward, but Lumian wasn't sure about the Deprivation Bullet's purpose.
"Those struck or grazed by it will lose one Beyonder power within fifteen minutes. As for which one, it's unpredictable," Jebus answered honestly.
This can complement a Fate Appropriator's abilities of designating the Deprivation... Lumian appraised Jebus and asked, "Do you have any other items? As a Shadow Merchant, don't you possess any mystical objects?"
Jebus explained embarrassedly, "I recently received the Under the Table boon. To complete the corresponding ritual and please truth, I traded all the items I had acquired, leaving only these.
"A merchant's rule is that you can buy and sell anything!"
Poor slob... Franca mocked disappointedly.
She then said to Jebus, "Give us all these items. They're the very reason you've been repeatedly caught up in danger and deity-level conflicts. Hand them over, and you'll be free. Once you're safe, you can start anew."
Similar to Anthony's hypnotic words, Jebus chose to believe it and gave everything to Franca.
After Franca stowed away the items, Lumian surveyed the area and asked, "Where is the School of Truth's headquarters? Which

Overseer do you report to?"
Hearing these two questions, Jenna, Franca, and Anthony quietly moved to Lumian's side.
Jebus hesitated for a few seconds and was about to respond when his expression suddenly twisted.
Seeing this, Lumian immediately said to Franca, "Toss the figurine over!"
Franca followed suit. She took out the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine from her Traveler's Bag and threw it to Jebus.
At the same time, she, Anthony, and Jenna grabbed Lumian's shoulders, arms, and other positions.
In the next instant, the four of them disappeared.
Boom!
Jebus exploded from the inside out, his shattered flesh merging with the pale-white fog, transforming into a peculiar blood mist.
The blood fog slowly descended, circling the Primordial Demoness's bone figurine before seeping into the soil.
After a few seconds, Lumian and the others teleported back.

Chapter 717: Supervision?

"Why did he just blow up like that?" Lumian muttered, frowning as he watched the blood slowly soaking into the soil. He gripped the carbide lamp tightly.

His two questions hadn't been intended to end Jebus's life. He had simply wanted to carefully test the limits, one step at a time.

Anthony calmly explained, "The fundamental rule of hypnosis is to never directly threaten the subject's life. So when Jebus was asked something that would seriously endanger him, he either would refuse to answer or the shock would jolt him awake, breaking the hypnotic hold."

"I was ready for the possibility of him breaking free from the hypnosis," Lumian said, having anticipated this outcome.

Jebus couldn't dodge the Spell of Harrumph at that range. Lumian also had three ritualistic dog skins and a cow hide in his Traveler's Bag.

Since becoming an Ascetic, he could now craft the mystical animal hides required for the Animal Creation Spell himself. So he had imbued extra powers into the ones he already possessed.

Thinking back on what had transpired, Jenna mused, "Jebus was going to answer at first... Meaning he didn't think those two questions would put his life at risk. Heh, guess things didn't play out like he expected."

Franca nodded."Exactly. If it was truly dangerous, he could've just stayed quiet.

"I assumed he was under some contract where revealing the School of Truth's headquarters or his direct Overseer's name would cause his shadow to attack his soul.

"Damn, what if his Overseer sneaked in extra terms when the contract was signed? Could that be why Jebus had no clue answering would be risky? Heavens, how tragic is that? Nothing but lies and trickery through and through—are we dealing with Swindlers or Brokers here?"

After Franca's lament, Lumian considered for a few moments.

"Overseer."

"Overseer?" Franca caught on immediately. "Overseeing subordinates is an Overseer ability, but Jebus didn't know that. Did he set off some forbidden conditions by answering key questions?"

Jenna snapped to attention.

"You think the Overseer spotted us already? Could they be on their way?"

"Unlikely. I had Franca leave the Primordial Demoness figurine here after noticing Jebus's strange reaction," Lumian said, smiling.

"Even if we're right, the Overseer probably just detected an issue with Jebus, not our precise location. The real problem is we may need to change our plans going forward."
Jenna and Anthony understood what Lumian meant.
They weren't under imminent threat or at risk of the Overseer tracking them down. But something had happened to Jebus, who was guarding Moran Avigny in the mirror world. Once the Overseer realized, they would easily deduce that someone was after Moran Avigny and undoubtedly take action. The scheme they had so carefully devised probably no longer fit the new circumstances.
Franca sighed heavily, eyeing the bone figurine on the ground with genuine regret.
"I resisted when the Demoness of Black first gave me this figurine. Now I'm wishing she'd given me a dozen!"
Poking fun at herself, she stooped down to retrieve the Primordial Demoness figurine. She delicately cleaned it off and murmured appreciatively.
Lumian took stock of his own actions.
"I should've been watching how Jebus's fate tributary shifted using the Eye of Calamity. Maybe then I could've intervened in time to stop him from responding."
He hadn't anticipated Jebus being oblivious to which questions would violate a taboo. This wasn't about religious devotion or advanced mystical knowledge. Jebus ought to have known what he could and couldn't say. If not, his daily life would've been cut short many times over.
Franca remembered, "The School of Truth member Jenna and I ran into before had the same thing happen when we asked his organizational affiliation and why he was capitalizing on the gatekeeper vanishing.
"Based on Jebus's answer, stating 'the School of Truth' itself isn't forbidden. And I bet the guy who wasn't even an Ambitionist yet had no idea why he was exploiting the gatekeeper's absence.
"Seems it really is an Overseer ability after all. No wonder the taboos are fluid, with the context, mental state, and overall situation determining what crosses the line each time. The rules adapt to the circumstances. Heh, just like the ideology Jebus described."
Lumian gave a small nod and laughed.
"Well, at least we secured the spoils early on. Would've been a huge waste otherwise."
He thought for a bit.
"Franca, contact the Demoness of Black with the charm later.

Inform her about the fixed mirror world entrance we made, what occurred, and how Jebus reacted. See what she thinks and advises.
"Right, she's likely a Tamara from the Apprentice branch. No love lost between her and Moran Avigny, who defected from the Judgement branch."
Franca concurred, and Lumian turned to Jenna next. "Head to the safehouse and send word to Madam Judgment. The Judgement pathway stands for order, so I feel we must alert her to the School of Truth situation at once. I'll take you there."
"Got it." Jenna was accustomed to Lumian delegating tasks in moments like these.
Finally, Lumian addressed Anthony.
"Join me at the Pleasure Pavilion to await Moran Avigny's arrival. Watch him closely for any unusual behavior."
Situated on Avenue du Boulevard, the opulent Pavilion of Pleasure functioned as the Intis Republic's presidential estate. Moran Avigny was due to attend a ministerial meeting convened by the president there.
Anthony inclined his head slightly to convey his assent.
Observation was a Spectator's forte, after all.
...
Inside the quarry cave housing the mirror world's fixed entryway,
Franca leaned against the wall, her night vision active. She produced a compact and a charm fashioned from ashen stone.
Clasping the charm, Franca infused it with her spirituality. Reciting the Hermes activation phrase, she intoned,
"Eyes!"
Wreathed in obsidian flames, the rock-like grayish charm flared to life. Franca touched it to the compact's glass,
causing the mirror to lose solidity and turn incorporeal.
The burning charm sank through without resistance, vanishing from sight.
Moments later, Franca sensed a presence surround her.
A mass of dark locks then rose from the makeup mirror's surface.
The rippling black tresses obscured her view.
As the hair fully emerged, Franca tightened her grasp, and Clarice took form before her.
The Demoness of Black's own hair remained immaculately tied up, with no trace of the ominous raven strands.
Even having met her prior, Franca couldn't suppress a rush of awe at Clarice's allure.
The woman possessed a breathtaking beauty that effortlessly ensnared any who beheld her.
Clarice regarded Franca, her melodic voice gentle as she inquired,

"You have an update?"
Composing herself, Franca detailed her suspicion of corruption seeping out of Underground Trier. She had ventured to a particular sector bearing the Primordial Demoness figurine, ultimately pinpointing the target site. She elaborated on beseeching the Primordial One via the figurine, obtaining a reply, and securing a permanent gateway to the mirror plane.
A rare glimmer of approval showed on Clarice's face. "Your instincts are sharp and your mind keen. Impressive that you conceived of and accomplished this. Perhaps you too shall rise to be a colored Demoness one day."
Demoness of Yellow? Franca grumbled to herself.
She went on to outline the scheme she had hatched with Lumian's crew, withholding specifics about the Tarot Club and portraying the Mirror Mark power as an item.
Clarice listened attentively without comment.
Franca recounted the offensive against Lumian amid his probe, his triumph over Jebus, and the bounty of intel gleaned through a Spectator.
The Demoness of Black nodded. "Your lovers are quite capable, the Hunter in particular."
Here Clarice smirked. "The taste of a Hunter isn't bad either. The higher their Sequence, the more intense and brave they grow."
Wh— Emperor, even an elite Demoness has perused your clandestine annals... Every Demoness probably owns an edition! Franca wavered between finding Emperor Roselle's plight humorous or pitiable.
"It certainly has its perks," Franca played along, smiling and trying to mask her chagrin.
The Demoness of Black proceeded, "However, both you and he erred.
"Upon amassing adequate knowledge, you should have ceased questioning without delay. The wiser course was to first ambush Moran Avigny, seize him, then interrogate further."
"Agreed." Franca accepted the Demoness of Black's reproach.
In hindsight, the location of the School of Truth's headquarters and the presiding Overseer's identity were not essential facts for their immediate needs. They could have morphed Jebus into a dog and set Lugano and Ludwig to guard him. While the Overseer remained unaware, she and the rest could have lurked within the mirror, poised for Moran Avigny to unwittingly enter of his own accord. Ample chances to take a second captive would have presented themselves down the line.
However, this was Lumian's style.

It had long been apparent to Franca that Lumian was predisposed to extracting intelligence on the spot. Only extraordinary reasons would induce him to postpone. As if he feared the slightest delay might thwart him from procuring otherwise obtainable insight.

Demoness of Black Clarice refrained from belaboring the point. Nodding, she declared, "Abide here for my return. I'll look into these developments, but it may require some time."

"As you wish, Madame Clarice." Franca made no effort to conceal her gratified smile.

...

Outside the dazzling Pavilion of Pleasure on Avenue du Boulevard, Lumian and Anthony seamlessly rejoined the throng of journalists.

Chapter 718: Another Warning

Lumian and Anthony only had to wait briefly before the ministers began exiting the Pavilion of Pleasure one by one.

They quickly approached Moran Avigny, the Minister of Industry. While listening to the other reporters' questions, they employed their unique abilities to observe him closely.

After just over ten seconds, Lumian turned to Anthony and gave a small shake of his head,

indicating that, for now, there was nothing unusual about Moran's river of fate.

He trusted that Anthony, being a Spectator, would understand his unspoken message.

Anthony responded with a slight head shake of his own, confirming to Lumian that Moran Avigny's expression and behavior appeared normal.

Has the Overseer directly responsible for Jebus not reached out to Moran Avigny? Or could our assumption be incorrect? Is it possible that Jebus's death wasn't detected by the Overseer's monitoring? Have they not fully grasped the situation with Jebus? These thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as he continued his observation.

This was precisely why he had come in person to the Pavilion of Pleasure to await Moran Avigny's appearance.

Only by acquiring the most current and reliable information could he assess whether to move forward with the original plan, adjust it, or temporarily set it aside!

Indeed, within Moran Avigny's river of fate, a tributary of him entering the full-body mirror in the study still exists, shrouded in an intense black hue... Lumian, unconcerned about the drain on his spirituality, maintained his focus on any potential shifts in Moran Avigny's destiny.

Following a short interview, the debonair Minister of Industry, flanked by his bodyguards, descended the steps of the Pavilion of Pleasure and headed towards his stylish four-wheeled, four-seater carriage.

As the valet opened the carriage door, Moran Avigny pulled out a small hand mirror from his pocket, seemingly checking his appearance.

In Trier's high society, this was a typical occurrence. Men's cosmetics and grooming had long been in vogue.

Moran Avigny peered into the hand mirror, his dark-gray pupils abruptly widening as his expression subtly changed.

Nearly simultaneously, Lumian, with his silver-black eyes,

detected a notable alteration in the Minister of Industry's fate tributary.
None of the tributaries suggested Moran Avigny's entry into the study's full-body mirror!
All relevant "choices" had vanished!
As a result, even if Lumian depleted nearly half of his spirituality and employed Compelling Fate, he would be unable to force Moran Avigny to "willingly" enter the study's full-body mirror.
Compelling Fate wasn't about creating destiny; choices had to exist before they could be compelled!
Taking advantage of the moment when the reporters had shifted their focus and the two of them were slowly trailing behind, Anthony quietly said to Lumian, "When Moran Avigny looked at himself in the hand mirror, he experienced a palpable sense of fear."
As Lumian followed the other reporters, he continued to assess Moran Avigny and formed a related hypothesis.
Someone was utilizing the mirror world and the hand mirror to convey a message to Moran Avigny!
The transmitted information likely pertained to the mysterious demise of Jebus Lata, who was tasked with guarding the study's full-body mirror, and the disappearance of his body.
For Moran Avigny, this implied that someone was conspiring against him. The shadow was already looming over him, its source and circumstances unknown.
Under such conditions, fear was inevitable. For the majority of people, emotions would inevitably manifest to some degree in their facial expressions and physical movements, making them readily apparent to Spectators.
Yes, given that Jebus possessed a Mirror Cufflink, it's reasonable to assume that the Overseer above him would have comparable items. They might even possess the additional capability to communicate via the mirror world... Lumian recalled, thinking of the glass cufflink now in Franca's possession. Moreover, Jebus had disclosed that Moran Avigny had instructed the other Mirror People from the Tamara family to assume new identities and relocate, leaving him as the sole contact with the School of Truth.
Consequently, when the Overseer discovered Jebus's unexplained disappearance and ultimate death, they would be unable to reach the other Mirror People. They could only await the conclusion of Moran Avigny's ministerial meeting to send him a warning.
Our prior conjectures have been validated. The Overseer did indeed detected Jebus's death. Whether the Overseer was limited by his abilities or hindered by the Primordial Demoness figurine is

uncertain, but he was unable to immediately locate us and launch a counterattack...
We must abandon the original plan. Getting Moran Avigny to 'willingly' enter the study's full-body mirror is no longer feasible...
Lost in thought, Lumian watched as Moran Avigny tucked away the hand mirror, boarded the carriage, and headed home.
Taking advantage of the still somewhat chaotic scene, he and Anthony discreetly left the Pavilion of Pleasure.
At the periphery of a square adorned with statues and obelisks, Lumian scanned his surroundings. Confirming that no one was nearby, he murmured to Anthony, "What do you think frightened Moran Avigny?"
He had already shared his theory with Anthony.
Drawing on his Spectator perspective, Anthony endeavored to analyze the psychological states of the School of Truth and Moran Avigny.
"Without intel on the enemy, it's improbable that the School of Truth, a secret organization worshiping an evil deity, would dispatch additional demigod-level operatives to Moran Avigny's proximity to enhance protection for the Mirror People. Unlike an orthodox Church, they can't afford to act rashly and perpetually escalate their involvement. They must consider the possibility that the group that apprehended Jebus is equally formidable, potentially including a demigod in their ranks. They might even suspect that this could be a covert mission orchestrated by the Purifier, Machinery Hivemind, or an elite unit from Bureau 8.
"In essence, the Overseer will convey to Moran Avigny that he's now on his own. They'll offer indirect support but can't intervene directly.
"Other cults might react with insanity, extremism, and irrationality while still defending Moran Avigny. However, based on Jebus's ideology, the School of Truth will refrain from such actions."
"That explains why Moran Avigny couldn't conceal his fear. It's tantamount to being forsaken." Lumian gently nodded.
Anthony continued his analysis.
"We must also take into account Moran Avigny's unique characteristic as a Mirror Person.
"The Mirror People we've previously encountered not only pursued their own ambitions but also exhibited a certain zealotry towards their leader and overarching objectives.
"Based on my observations, while Moran Avigny is undeniably terrified, he managed to exercise some restraint. Upon entering the carriage, he appeared resolute and determined."

Lumian comprehended and remarked, "Is he contemplating self-sacrifice? He'll promptly alert the other Mirror People and urge them to swiftly conceal themselves. As for himself, he's under the strict protection of officials, rendering escape impossible. His only option is to remain in place, visible to the enemy faction, hoping that his fortune is sufficient and the official protection proves effective.

"Heh heh, in times like these, protection becomes another form of confinement."

Anthony shifted the topic. "Which tributary turned black following the change in Moran Avigny's fate?"

Lumian shook his head. "Nothing at present. This is an exceptionally unique situation. It signifies that it will manifest only when Moran Avigny makes a new choice, branching into a new fate tributary."

At this juncture, Lumian exhaled slowly and stated, "I don't perceive any other opportunities at the moment. It would have been good if the Overseer had acted rashly and protected Moran Avigny. The Demoness of Black should be awaiting him. Hmm, let's locate Jenna and Franca first."

...

In the quarry cave housing a permanent entrance to the mirror world, Franca, who had been patiently waiting, witnessed black hair reemerge from the mirror, descending strand by strand.

Demoness of Black Clarice materialized and spoke softly, "Currently, no Beyonders are concealed behind the relevant mirror. They must have abandoned Moran Avigny.

"I'm unable to provide assistance at this time. You must reevaluate your strategy and devise a means to capture Moran Avigny, who is under the robust protection of official Beyonders, without entering the mirror world."

Do you have a solution in mind? Franca wished to inquire but refrained out of concern for offending the Demoness of Black. Instead, she simply replied, "Understood."

...

In a secure safe house within the administrative district, Jenna informed Lumian and Anthony, "Madame Judgment has instructed us to halt further action for now. She needs to confer with the other Major Arcana card holders regarding the information obtained from Jebus."

With Ma'am Hermit? Lumian pondered silently, immersed in thought.

He gave a small nod and said, "Let's go find Franca."

After rendezvousing with Franca in the subterranean quarry cave

and sharing their discoveries, Lumian sighed and declared, "For the time being, we have no choice but to abandon our efforts."
As Franca and the others nodded in agreement, Lumian suddenly heard a resounding voice.
"Don't you believe you're capitulating prematurely?
"Did you fail to notice any issues?"
Termiboros... *Why is He offering me guidance?* And it's not an urgent matter that threatens Him? Lumian couldn't help but furrow his brow.
Termiboros's profound voice persisted, "Consider this. If you were an Overseer, what actions would you take in such a scenario?"
"Naturally, they would reduce personnel and conceal themselves to prevent the enemy from discovering clues and pursuing them..." Lumian muttered under his breath. "Beyond this, what else can they do? How can they indirectly aid Moran Avigny?"
Franca, Jenna, and Anthony observed Lumian as he mumbled to himself, awaiting his ultimate explanation.
Abruptly, a possibility occurred to Lumian.
He gazed at his three companions and said in a low, serious tone, "Under the Table Transaction!"
"Safeguard Moran Avigny through a high-level Under the Table transaction!"
"That's why we each abandoned the plan for distinct reasons. Even the river of fate currently shows no death calamity for Moran Avigny!"

Chapter 719: Advancing

"We were under the influence of an Under the Table transaction?"

Franca carefully reviewed the entire situation but couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. The only thing that stood out was that the Demoness of Black probably had a way to quickly extract Moran Avigny while he was under the protection of an official Beyonder team. She clearly knew how to exploit the mirror world, yet she burdened everything upon her.

Of course, her actions made sense when put into context. Even though Moran Avigny's security detail consisted of Mid-Sequence Beyonders, this was Trier, the capital of the Intis Republic. It was a diocese of great importance to both the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the God of Steam and Machinery Church. Numerous demigods were posted there, ready to intervene at a moment's notice. If the Demoness of Black couldn't end the fight quickly and eliminate all witnesses, she would face severe repercussions. Official Beyonders might even track her using specialized Sealed Artifacts.

If something happened to her, the Demoness Sect's Trier branch would be dealt a crippling blow. In a situation like this, it would be wiser for her to assign a capable member of middling rank to handle the matter while she focused on damage control. If things went south, she could easily cut ties with Franca and her lovers.

This assumed, of course, that Moran Avigny wasn't valuable enough for the Demoness Sect to go to great lengths to eliminate him. If he were, the sect would have evacuated non-essential personnel beforehand and assembled high-ranking, color-named Demonesses in Trier.

"I think there's an issue here. It's not that we shouldn't or can't abandon the mission, but rather that we gave up far too readily and hastily," Anthony remarked, analyzing the situation from a human behavioral standpoint.

Franca nodded pensively and added, "Indeed. The Demoness of Black only briefly verified the absence of hidden Beyonders behind the mirror in question before concluding that Moran Avigny had been abandoned and would receive no further assistance."

"That's way too rushed and convenient," Jenna commented.

After a moment's hesitation, she asked, "Was Madam Judgment affected as well?"

"It's possible." Lumian glanced down at his chest.

Lowering his voice, he asked, "Termiboros, why weren't you impacted? Is it because you're an Angel?"

Termiboros's imposing voice echoed within Lumian's body.

"It's hard to say for certain. It could also be due to The Fool's seal.

While the seal does limit me, it can also serve as a safeguard under certain circumstances."
Similar to Naboredisley's Abomination corpse? The Overseer's Under the Table transaction couldn't breach Mr. Fool's seal, so it had no effect on Termiboros? Lumian nodded in understanding and said to Jenna, "We need to inform Madam Judgment of our suspicions. If an Under the Table transaction is indeed at play, she'll undoubtedly break free of its influence and offer new guidance once alerted. If she's unaffected, the messenger will just have to put in a bit of extra effort.
"Got it." Jenna grasped Lumian's point. "Even though we suspect an Under the Table transaction, we can't act recklessly right now. We still require fresh directives from the Major Arcana cardholders."
As Franca waited for Madam Judgment's reply, she let out a sigh.
"Is something wrong?" Jenna inquired, her worry apparent.
Franca responded with a mix of sorrow and outrage, "This Under the Table transaction was exceptionally lavish. It impacted no fewer than two demigods. The Overseer of the School of Truth must have paid a steep price and offered up a considerable number of precious items."
Sure, that's all true, but what's it got to do with you? *Why are you so worked up about it?* Jenna blinked, struggling to grasp Franca's train of thought.
Franca elaborated, "Once Madam Judgment apprehends or eliminates him with our assistance, there won't be much left in terms of spoils of war for us to divvy up.
"We might end up with another penniless target like Jebus!"
Lumian, Jenna, and Anthony were momentarily at a loss for words.
You're already worrying about hypothetical future spoils?
Lumian shifted the topic and turned to Franca and Jenna.
"When I posed those final two questions to Jebus, why did you two lean in closer to me? Did you sense that something was about to go awry?"
"Naturally, it was a Demoness's intuitive premonition," Franca declared smugly. "While I couldn't pinpoint what exactly would happen, being nearer to you provided me with more options for dealing with potential threats."
Jenna gave a subtle nod, indicating that she felt the same way.
Lumian faced Anthony. "What about you?"
Anthony answered honestly, "I suspected that the last two questions would snap Jebus out of his hypnotic state. Franca and Jenna's reactions indirectly validated my concerns.
"Given that, it seemed prudent to take cover behind you two."

"So you're using us as human shields?" Franca remarked with a wry smile.
Anthony nodded earnestly. "You two have Mirror Substitution at your disposal."
"Fair point," Franca conceded.
After a short while, Madam Judgment's messenger delivered a response. The message was succinct: "Proceed with your course of action."
Does this imply that the Major Arcana cardholders will monitor the situation? Have they consulted with Ma'am Hermit? Lumian nodded thoughtfully and grinned at Franca and the others.
"Let's stick to our initial plan."
"The initial plan?" Franca started, taken aback.
"Precisely," Lumian confirmed, still smiling. "Over the next several hours, potentially even a full day, the Overseer and the other Mirror People certainly won't be guarding Moran Avigny from behind the full-length mirror in his study. That should be a necessary condition for the Under the Table transaction to succeed. The Demoness of Black has already inspected those locations, and the Overseer is unaware of when she might do so again. He needs to allow sufficient time.
"Put another way, if we conceal ourselves within that mirror, we'll be safe from disruption and harm."
Jenna's brow furrowed slightly.
"But doesn't the heart of the issue lie in the fact that Moran Avigny won't be entering the full-length mirror anytime soon? How can we ambush him..."
Jenna abruptly trailed off, as if a thought had just occurred to her.
Lumian's grin widened. "The Overseer may resort to an Under the Table transaction, but so can we!"
"Indeed, the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction!" Franca immediately grasped Lumian's implication.
Lumian planned to harness the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction to plant the idea in Moran Avigny's mind to re-enter the full-length mirror!
As for how an Under the Table transaction would enable such an arrangement to work, that wasn't their concern. Even the Overseer probably didn't know the inner workings of the Under the Table transaction.
Under the Table dealings were, in a sense, a black box!
With Magic Mirror Divination verifying the level of risk, Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony ventured into the enigmatic and shadowy realm via the mirror world entrance affixed to the jutting rock.

Surveying the spiderweb-like void passageways stretching to unknown destinations, Lumian activated the Mirror Mark contract imprinted on him.
He then addressed Franca and the others, "I can detect the full-length mirror and determine its precise whereabouts."
"In that case, let's make our way there immediately." Franca pulled up her Assassin suit's hood once more and latched onto Lumian's arm.
She had already donned the Mirror Cufflink, but why squander one of its uses when other means were available?
As soon as Jenna and Anthony grabbed hold of him again, Lumian triggered the Spirit World Traversal mark and teleported through one of the dark, vacant passageways to a deep, black aqueous light.
The aqueous light signified a mirror with a corresponding hazy zone linked to myriad illusory tunnels akin to spiderwebs.
Lumian peered into the dark aqueous light and observed the scene through the glass mirror. It was undoubtedly Moran Avigny's study.
Franca likewise recognized the target's position and breathed a sigh of relief.
"I'll handle the Under the Table transaction."
"Allow me." Lumian smiled. "Given what transpired earlier, I might encounter Demons even without the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction. In that case, I might as well use it freely."
He was alluding to the events surrounding Naboredisley.
"Very well." Franca yielded to Lumian's reasoning. "Then I'll cover the cost!"
She produced 5,000 verl d'or worth of gold from her Traveler's Bag.
Lumian accepted without protest and said to Jenna and the others, "The transaction I aim to complete is to instill in Moran Avigny the notion of entering the full-length mirror in his study. Then, I'll employ Compelling Fate to transform that notion into reality.
"This is far simpler than directly compelling Moran Avigny to enter the mirror. The price will undoubtedly be lower."
"Understood." Jenna retrieved the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction from her backpack.
The small, dark wooden box still had eight uses remaining.
Lumian grasped Franca's pouch of gold coins in his right hand and reached through the membrane-like "curtain."
He then felt five damp, wrinkled fingers. They swiftly closed around the pouch containing the gold coins.
Lumian's expression remained neutral as he articulated his request in Hermes.
After a brief pause, the wrinkled, moist palm returned the pouch of

gold coins.
Wh— Lumian glanced up and apprised Franca and the others of the development.
Franca promptly understood. "It's demanding more money!"
Her heart sank as she produced additional banknotes and gold, but the slightly cold, wrinkled palm kept rejecting the payment.
Lumian contributed tens of thousands of verl d'or, yet the transaction still wouldn't go through.
"Could it be that Under the Table doesn't desire money or gold?" Jenna recalled Jebus's insights regarding the Broker pathway.
"Perhaps it requires a mystical item?" Lumian pondered, considering what he could offer.
Franca deliberated for a moment before suggesting, "What about the Blood Gold ring? It has considerable drawbacks, and we've hardly used it."
The Blood Gold ring had come from Mad Lady and corresponded to some of the capabilities of a Sequence 6 Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway.
The four of them conferred for a while before deciding to attempt the transaction with the Blood Gold ring.
The moment the Blood Gold ring touched Under the Table, the five fingers of the palm clenched firmly and withdrew, taking the ring with them.
This indicated that the deal had been finalized.
Phew... Lumian exhaled in relief and remarked, "I'm curious to see how the Under the Table transaction will unfold..."
Franca pressed a hand to her chest and prayed to Mr. Fool, "Please don't let us run into any swindlers. Praise The Fool!"

Chapter 720: Unexpected "Helper"

The word "swindler" hung in the air, leaving Lumian and the others in stunned silence as similar thoughts raced through their minds.

Surely they couldn't be that unlucky, right?

Jebus had warned them about the possibility of running into swindlers during an Under the Table deal, but Franca's previous experiences with Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction had always been reliable. Plus, the Blood Gold ring had been accepted this time around.

If Lumian hadn't been personally overseeing the transaction, he would've used the Eye of Calamity to assess the likelihood of it being finalized and look for ways to interfere.

But for now, the four of them had no choice but to wait patiently. Hidden behind the dark, watery light, they watched the scene unfolding in the study through the glass mirror.

As the night wore on, Lumian and his companions nibbled on the rations he'd packed for Ludwig in his Traveler's Bag to keep their hunger at bay.

Close to 10 p.m., Moran Avigny strode into the study, leaving the wooden door wide open. He sank into an armchair beneath the gas wall lamp, grabbed a book from a nearby pile, and began casually flipping through it.

The Purifier team tasked with his protection remained stationed at the door as usual, never setting foot inside.

Moran Avigny had always insisted on this arrangement. He'd even signed contracts with the Purifiers, Machinery Hivemind members, and Bureau 8 team, acknowledging that he was willing to take on the associated risks.

The security detail understood. A politician's study likely concealed all sorts of shady secrets. Keeping people with Beyonder powers from entering was a way for Moran Avigny to protect himself.

As was his custom, Moran Avigny left the study door open instead of shutting it, making it simpler for the Purifiers to keep an eye out for any potential trouble.

While perusing the books, Moran Avigny would occasionally glance up at the full-length mirror positioned just out of the Purifiers' line of sight, his thoughts seemingly far away.

At the same time, Lumian's eyes, hidden within the mirror, glinted a silvery-black.

Peering through the glass, he studied Moran Avigny's river of fate.

Looking closer, he confirmed that the Minister of Industry had indeed gained several new fate tributaries involving stepping into

the full-length mirror. One of them was even cloaked in a thick, black hue.
Seizing the moment when Moran Avigny ducked his head to resume reading, Lumian slowly reached his right palm out from the mirror, pressing it firmly against the glass as if it were merely a reflection.
Then, he unleashed his remaining spirituality, transforming it into a raging, phantom river that surged toward the mercury stream symbolizing Moran Avigny's fate from a few meters away.
The main trunk of Moran Avigny's fate swallowed up the other tributaries and rushed into the dense, black one.
Compelling Fate!
Channeling the spirituality he'd accumulated using his Ascetic abilities, Lumian quickly withdrew his palm to avoid tipping off Moran Avigny.
He gave Franca and the others a nod, signaling that both the Under the Table deal and his Compelling of Fate had been successful.
As for the exact way Moran Avigny would embark on this fated path, Lumian couldn't say. The details were beyond his sight.
Franca and Jenna let out sighs of relief.
Not daring to speak lest they alert Moran Avigny, who possessed mirror-related abilities, they shared their understanding with Lumian through gratified smiles and relaxed nods.
They retreated to their positions, preparing for the upcoming ambush.
Just as fate was being compelled, Moran Avigny's spirituality abruptly sensed a warning, filling him with a feeling of impending danger.
The mirror message he'd received at dusk sprang to mind, and he started to suspect that the unknown enemy the Overseer had mentioned was plotting something that could put his life at risk.
Unable to resist, Moran Avigny glanced at the full-length mirror once more, debating whether to flee into it and abandon this place before the Purifiers had a chance to react. He yearned to shed his current identity and vanish completely from the hidden enemy's radar.
Fighting back his impulses, he turned his head to look at the Purifiers standing guard at the door.
There could be a trap lurking behind the mirror. His best bet was to pray that the official Beyonders would be able to shield him!
This is Trier, and I'm a minister of the country!
Right then, his valet appeared at the door, carrying a glass of warm milk.
Drinking warm milk before showering and brushing his teeth was

part of Moran Avigny's nightly routine to help him sleep.
The Purifiers carried out their standard checks before permitting the valet to enter the study.
"Your milk, Sir," the valet said deferentially, extending a white porcelain cup brimming with the liquid.
Moran Avigny had made immense contributions to Intis's industrial growth and had been awarded the Legion of Honor medal, earning him the rank of Knight.
Nodding his head slightly, Moran Avigny reached out his right hand to accept the glass.
All of a sudden, he noticed his valet's eyes cloud over, an indescribable agony lurking in their depths.
A heartbeat later, the valet's mouth flew open and he vomited.
What he spat out was a solid, writhing chunk of blood-colored flesh, hurled directly at Moran Avigny!
The flesh swiftly ballooned, morphing into a cloak of flesh and blood that wrapped around Moran Avigny. It wriggled inward, seemingly trying to force its way into the Minister of Industry's body.
In the mirror, Lumian was stunned.
This aura...
It's Mr. K!
Why had he shown up out of nowhere to try to assassinate Moran Avigny?
With a sharp crack, Moran Avigny, cocooned in the flesh-and-blood cloak, transformed into a mirror and shattered.
Nearly simultaneously, the Purifiers at the door sprang into action.
A column of pure light wreathed in flames plummeted from the sky, bathing the cloak and causing it to visibly start melting.
Witnessing this, Moran Avigny spun around without hesitation and lunged at the mirror nearest to him.
He had already revealed Mirror Substitution to the Purifiers. Short of eliminating every witness without a trace, he would undoubtedly face intense scrutiny later on and lose the protection of the contract.
His only option was to take advantage of this chance to escape through the mirror world while the Purifiers tangled with the assassin!
As he watched Moran Avigny's figure loom larger and nearer to the full-length mirror, a thought abruptly struck Lumian.
Could this be fate?
He instantly retreated and disappeared.
A moment later, Moran Avigny's figure passed through the mirror, emerging behind the hazy, shadowy, and nearly vacant looking

glass.
The Purifiers outside were shocked to see this. At the same time, they grasped that something was seriously wrong with the target under their protection.
Their attention wavered briefly. Taking advantage of the distraction, Mr. K changed Grazing targets and teleported away from Moran Avigny's residence.
In the space behind the mirror, Moran Avigny didn't linger. He promptly activated Mirror Traversal, rapidly changing positions to throw off any would-be pursuers.
Just then, he felt his body grow inexplicably heavier, his movements oddly constricted, stopping him from successfully slipping into an empty, dark tunnel.
It was as though someone had seized him.
Right after that, Moran Avigny sensed invisible threads coiling around his limbs and torso, layer upon layer.
With his Sheriff powers, he pinpointed the source of the sinister threads. They were close by.
Moran Avigny angled his head marginally and peered at an empty corner. His eyes flashed with two blinding "lightning bolts."
Psychic Piercing!
The "lightning" lanced out, hitting the empty spot. A sharp cracking rang out, scattering shards of shattered mirrors.
At the same instant, Jenna, dressed in a black gown and veiled bonnet, materialized behind Moran Avigny, gripping a small, elegant revolver.
Bang!
She squeezed the trigger, targeting Moran Avigny's vest.
The yellow bullet, wreathed in silent black flames, struck the target's body with precision at close range.
Crack! Moran Avigny deployed Mirror Substitution yet again.
As broken mirrors rained down, his figure rematerialized in a different corner of the hazy space. Franca and Jenna vanished without a trace.
Feeling the intangible threads enveloping him, Moran Avigny thrust out his right palm and intoned in ancient Hermes, "Invisibility is prohibited here!"
The instant he uttered the final word, innumerable transparent spider silks undulated throughout the area, resembling seaweed blanketing a section of ocean. Franca, garbed as an Assassin, and Jenna, clad in dark attire, circled or advanced, respectively, poised to strike again.
Realizing that the two foes couldn't touch him for the moment and that the invisible spider silk hadn't constricted, Moran Avigny had

no time for a counterattack. He immediately sought to use Mirror Traversal to flee the area.
Out of nowhere, Moran Avigny's eyes bulged, his expression contorting with viciousness.
His body shattered once more, assuming the shape of a mirror.
Not far off, Anthony Reid, dressed like a veteran, "appeared."
He had just cast Frenzy on Moran Avigny!
The Prohibition of Invisibility rule didn't constrain him since he wasn't invisible. However, Moran Avigny himself hadn't been looking in Anthony's direction!
After employing Mirror Substitution multiple times, Moran Avigny rematerialized on the far side of the space, putting distance between himself and Franca, Jenna, and Anthony.
Grasping that yet another enemy had entered the fray, he fled with intensified urgency.
Right as Moran Avigny was poised to activate Mirror Traversal, Franca lowered her hood, unveiling her radiant, refined features.
As she did, the diamond necklace adorning her neck emitted a subtle glow.
Beatrice's Necklace!
Moran Avigny's body flushed with heat, his gaze magnetized to Franca's lake-blue eyes, her high, delicate nose bridge, her fair, flawless skin, and her lush, crimson lips. For an instant, his desire to escape slipped his mind.
The activation of Beatrice's Necklace didn't pose a direct threat to Moran Avigny's life, so it failed to trigger Mirror Substitution. Moran Avigny lacked the time to deploy it himself. His cravings had already swelled beyond his control!

Chapter 721: Exhausting the Substitutes

A Demoness of Pleasure didn't possess an innately proactive charm, but she could maximize her allure to irresistible levels. Even under normal circumstances, her magnetism could make most men unable to shift their gazes away, their breathing growing labored as their minds raced with desire. Moran Avigny had certainly never been an Ascetic, and his lust was already inflamed by Beatrice's Necklace.

His focus was solely locked on Franca now, imagination running wild with tantalizing possibilities of what might happen next.

Heart pounding, blood surging, his movements were affected—swift but erratic.

A dawn-like glow emanated from Moran's body, marking Franca as the target of his righteous punishment. This enhanced his influence and offensive power against the tempting demoness.

As he selected her for punishment, Moran seemed to grow taller in Franca's eyes, striking fear into her heart. She sensed he was a formidable figure who could end her existence with a mere thought.

She broke invisibility and tried to quickly shift positions.

Seizing the opportunity, Moran thrust out his right hand, breathing hot and heavy, and spoke an ancient Hermes incantation: "Imprison!"

Viscous amber liquid surged forth, enveloping Franca and freezing the demoness in place within a colossal transparent prison.

Crack!

Franca's form shattered, transforming into a palm-sized makeup mirror.

This allowed her to escape the Disciplinary Paladin's Imprison.

Suddenly, powerful danger premonition gripped Moran. Straining his enhanced physique, he broke free of the intangible spider silk ensnaring him and dove to the side.

Jenna's ice spike wreathed in unholy black flames narrowly missed its mark as she struck with all her might from the diagonal flank.

Moran's eyes flicked to the Witch in her dark dress and bonnet. He couldn't help but think she was quite appealing too.

Why not have both?

Dropping to one knee, Moran reached out towards Jenna and bellowed another Hermes invocation: "Confinement!"

Wordlessly, an immaterial wall materialized around Jenna, impenetrable even to her Spirit Body.

Rather than adhering directly to her, it generated a transparent

cell with her at its center, thwarting any attempt at Mirror Substitution.
Taking note of this, Jenna opted not to strike the unseen barrier. Instead, she enveloped herself in a layer of frost.
Beyond the frost was another layer of frost—a delicate vacuum formed, transforming Jenna into a frozen statue.
"Confinement!"
Moran Avigny didn't immediately press his advantage against Jenna. His bloodshot eyes fixed on Franca as he confined the space surrounding the Demoness of Pleasure.
Franca remained unresponsive as black flames surged forth from her form.
Outside the black blaze, strata of frost coalesced, fashioning a translucent, sturdy sarcophagus.
Transparent spider silk wound around her, cocooning the frost in spirals.
Wh— Moran Avigny, though perplexed by the Demoness of Pleasure's peculiar behavior, took satisfaction in the success of his Confinement, circumventing the effects of Mirror Substitution.
His movements somewhat warped, he lunged at Franca. His mind raced with the powers he would unleash next and the consequences of bringing her under his control.
He had almost forgotten the presence of the Spectator, but Anthony had slipped into a blind spot.
No matter, I'll subdue the two Demonesses first! The instant this notion crossed Moran Avigny's mind, a faintly piercing melody abruptly resounded in his ears.
Lumian stepped out from the corner shadows, the black Symphony of Hatred bone flute at his lips.
Prohibition of Invisibility hadn't compelled him to reveal himself, as he wasn't invisible to begin with. He had merely shape-shifted into a shadow being, blending with the shadows!
Lumian studied Moran Avigny's face, twisted by desire. Approaching with a grin, he played the melody with intensified vigor.
Given Moran Avigny's state, he was certain the Symphony of Hatred's exploitation of vulnerabilities would undeniably inflame the other's cravings. Employing his Fate Appropriator's abilities in tandem was unnecessary.
Amid the lively, cutting music, Moran Avigny's body abruptly went rigid.
With a cracking noise, he invoked Mirror Substitution to endure the nearly lethal assault on his behalf.
Moran Avigny's silhouette manifested behind Lumian, but

Lumian's performance persisted, and the nigh-explosive lust gripping Moran Avigny remained unabated.
Crack! Crack! Crack!
Moran Avigny's form repeatedly fractured like a mirror, rematerializing in the ever-quickening melody. He couldn't flee the vicinity, nor could he spare a moment to obstruct his hearing.
The captivating strains of the Symphony of Hatred permeated every nook of the space behind the mirror.
Anthony crouched in a corner, employing a prop he had readied beforehand to shield his ears. He was set to bank on the mirror to induce a trance and plunge into deep sleep, thus evading Lumian's lethal melody that spared neither friend nor foe.
Despite his preparations, grayish-white dragon scales involuntarily surfaced on his skin.
Crack! Crack! Moran Avigny's Mirror Substitution had at last been exhausted.
His mind reeled, and he experienced overwhelming pleasure, a surge of euphoria.
His frame shuddered with pain and rapture.
Blood seeped from his nostrils, eyes, ears, and mouth. His saliva, mucus, and tears streamed all at once, as though he teetered on the brink of collapse.
Lumian appeared behind him, lowered the Symphony of Hatred, and snorted.
Twin beams of white light struck Moran Avigny, plunging the Disciplinary Paladin into unconsciousness.
Lumian afforded Moran Avigny no opportunity to harness his unique powers to rouse himself. He produced a ritualistic dog skin from his Traveler's Bag and draped it over the gradually crumpling foe's head.
"Dog!" Lumian declared in Hermes.
With a shadowy flash, Moran Avigny vanished, supplanted by an enormous dog with tawny fur.
Amid the intangible thud of the dog collapsing to the ground, it lay insensible on its flank.
Lumian smiled, stooped down, and scooped up the dog.
Witnessing this, Anthony dislodged the gag that had wholly covered his ears, and Jenna shed the dual layers of frost encasing her.
Franca lagged slightly. After a handful of seconds, the cocoon ruptured, and the ice coffin noiselessly dissipated, prompting the black flames to disperse.
She regarded Lumian and Jenna with astonishment and delight, stating, "My Pleasure potion underwent substantial digestion!"

No sooner had she concluded her statement than she pinched her nose and surveyed the spot where Moran Avigny had stood and the massive dog cradled in Lumian's arms.
"I know what's going on... He must have just savored genuine pleasure—utmost pleasure. Moreover, this 'pleasure' stemmed from me."
Lumian deliberated momentarily before replying, "He even staked his life to remain in pursuit of the pleasure you bestowed upon him, weathering the same excruciating agony. Ultimately, he attained the pleasure he coveted, albeit not in the manner he desired. He paid the steepest price for it."
"He's also a Beyonder on par with Sequence 5," Franca remarked with a wistful smile. "Regrettably, I wasn't the one wielding the Symphony of Hatred; otherwise, my Pleasure potion might have been fully digested. Pleasure begets pain, and pleasure lures people into depravity. Pleasure is akin to a candle flame to a moth..."
At this juncture, she lowered her voice and mumbled in an unfamiliar tongue, "Lust is a dangerous game..."
Franca harbored no excessive regrets. Among them, only Lumian could shoulder the adverse cost of the Symphony of Hatred.
Anthony scanned the environs and serenely prompted Franca, "Since we've succeeded, let's leave quickly."
Jenna had already drawn near to Lumian, who had likewise stowed away the Symphony of Hatred.
"Okay." Franca nodded and took several paces to Lumian's side, grasping his upper arm.
Concurrently, black flames ignited behind the mirror.
Within seconds, the quartet emerged from the fixed portal to the mirror world in the quarry cave. Franca finalized the anti-divination and anti-prophecy measures.
Subsequently, they teleported back to the secured residence in the administrative district.
Franca sighed. "Beatrice's Necklace can no longer trigger Lust..."
Beatrice's Necklace could only trigger such desires twice. The inaugural target of Lust was Gardner Martin.
For Demoness Franca, this signified the loss of a potent auxiliary means.
Jenna nodded slightly. "How unfortunate. It appears the Demoness of Pleasure and the Sex Addict of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway can forge an ideal and efficacious partnership."
"Indeed. Unfortunately, I cannot obtain the Mother Tree of Desire's boon. Otherwise..." Franca abruptly fell silent, and an identical phrase flitted through the minds of Lumian and the others: Sex Addict Demoness!

Clearing her throat twice, Franca said, "I can only hope that the bestowed of the Mother Tree of Desire will bestow comparable props."
She turned to the enfeebled dog, who had yet to stir, and contemplated briefly before proposing, "Administer truth serum to him first, then have Anthony befriend him as a two-
pronged approach? Yes, employ the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell as a precautionary step..."
Lumian nodded, recollecting the "criticism" the Demoness of Black had leveled at Franca. Quelling his avarice, he said, "No need to rush. I'll question him after visiting Mr. K. Mr. K must have his motives for abruptly targeting Moran Avigny for assassination. Only by consulting him can we extract more pertinent intelligence later."
Franca and the others nodded in concurrence. "Agreed."
...
19 Rue Scheer, Psychic Magazine headquarters.
Lumian alighted from the carriage, attired in a light-blue cotton shirt following a change of clothing, and entered the six-story white luxurious residence.

Chapter 722: He Knows

In the basement of 19 Rue Scheer, Lumian encountered Mr. K.

If he hadn't witnessed Mr. K transform into flesh and blood to envelop Moran Avigny and subsequently suffer holy light damage from the Purifiers, Lumian wouldn't have believed that the energetic, black-hooded man before him had recently infiltrated the Intis Republic's Minister of Industry's residence and carried out an assassination.

"You're back from the Southern Continent?" Mr. K's voice was as deep and raspy as ever.

Instead of sitting in the red armchair, he stood directly in front of Lumian, in the shadows projected by the crystal chandelier.

Lumian didn't hide anything and smiled. "I'm back to do a favor for a friend. I'll be leaving again in the future. As you know, I can teleport."

Mr. K's expansive hood swayed gently, as if nodding.

He said with relief, "The fact that you still remember to come here and praise the Lord's glory after returning to Trier proves I didn't misjudge you."

Lumian, having just completed the prayer process with Mr. K, felt guilty and ashamed.

He cut to the chase.

"I saw you assassinate Moran Avigny."

Under his hood, Mr. K's gaze suddenly took on a tangible quality, and the shadows around him flickered.

After a few seconds, the Aurora Order Oracle asked in a hoarse voice, "You were there?"

Lumian maintained a relaxed demeanor as he replied, "Yes. Your assassination method bore the hallmarks of a Rose Bishop and was suspected of using Grazing to teleport. Even with just the Purifiers' information, it wouldn't be hard for me to guess it was you. But I admit, I was indeed present."

"Where were you hiding?" Mr. K inquired.

Lumian replied with a smile, "In the mirror Moran Avigny fled into."

At this, Mr. K's black robe fluttered despite the still air, as if countless flesh and blood were cheering beneath.

Unable to hide his excitement, he asked, "And now? Have you captured Moran Avigny?"

"Yes." Lumian nodded solemnly.

"Hahaha! Hahaha!" Mr. K half-raised his body, revealing his thin chin, and erupted into maniacal laughter.

His laughter made Lumian's ears ring. Light and shadows danced

in the basement, the stench of blood permeating the air.
Finally, Mr. K stopped laughing and spoke with unnerving fanaticism,
"Just as the Lord arranged. Piousness is indeed the only way out!"
He began tracing a cross on his chest.
"Praise you for creating all. Praise you for bearing the world's sins!"
Lumian also praised the Aurora Order's True Creator.
Mr. K smiled and sighed.
"I had planned to assassinate Moran Avigny in the coming days, but hadn't set a date. However, when I saw him at the window this evening, gazing at the distant scenery, I sensed something off about his emotional state.
"Fearing something might go wrong, I hastily launched the operation and failed.
"I was about to repent to the Lord and shoulder my sins when you arrived and told me you had captured Moran Avigny.
"What does this signify?
"It means the Lord has prearranged everything. We need only pray, act, and do things with devotion. Nothing else matters.
"With piousness, failure is a stepping stone to success. Without it, even success leads to failure."
In previous conversations with Mr. K, Lumian had always felt a language barrier. He understood the words but couldn't truly grasp the fanatical state.
But this time, his heart raced and a chill ran down his spine.
Could the Under the Table transaction I initiated through the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction be connected to the Aurora Order's Lord?
Is that why Moran Avigny suddenly risked leaving through the study mirror? Why he came to the study to assess the environment, weighing the risks as he feigned reading...
So, after I compelled Moran Avigny's fate, Mr. K hurried to the study to assassinate him, forcing him to flee to the nearest mirror —the full-body one we hid in...
During the transaction, we paid with the Blood Gold ring, derived from the Beyonder characteristic of a Sequence 6 Rose Bishop of the Secrets Suppliant pathway...
Lumian chose to share his feelings with Mr. K but concealed his fear and the power of Compelling Fate. He attributed all the developments to the Authority Holder's Under-the-table Transaction.
Despite his frenzied laughter, Mr. K remained composed. Solemnly and fanatically, he said, "The Lord watches, the Lord listens, and the Lord knows."

Lumian had heard Madam Magician say similar words before but hadn't felt their weight. He hadn't even been troubled, knowing it was futile. But now, every hair on his body stood on end, a chill running down his spine.
He sensed eyes watching him from every shadow.
The more he experienced and learned, the more acutely he felt the terror and oppression of those three short sentences.
After a few seconds, Lumian praised the True Creator again and asked, "Mr. K, why did you assassinate Moran Avigny? My friends and I dealt with him because the real Moran Avigny is dead. The active one is a Mirror Person. What about you?"
"Mirror Person? No wonder he has Mirror Substitution. That's precisely what I didn't anticipate—causing the assassination to fail," Mr. K sighed with realization.
Pacing back and forth, he told Lumian,
"Recent cases in Intis have led to an organization called the School of Truth. They used degenerates from cults and official organizations to achieve certain goals. For example, a descendant of Poli vanished mysteriously, and closely monitored pages from Roselle's diary disappeared."
Poli? One of Emperor Roselle's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse? A descendant of his has vanished? Lumian's eyelids twitched at the thought.
Jebus Lata had mentioned the School of Truth's three goals: finding clues about the fallen heaven, Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum, and 0-05, the Magic Wishing Lamp.
The Fourth Epoch Trier's seal had just been breached. For now, Intis's official organizations were unlikely to overlook anything. As for 0-05, Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter Bernadette held it. The School of Truth admitted they couldn't handle the Element Dawn leader yet. They wanted more boons before trying.
In other words, two of the three targets required long-term planning from the School of Truth. That left clues about Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum. Jebus mentioned having no relevant clues himself. Whether the Overseer did was uncertain.
Combined with Mr. K's account, Lumian had a bad feeling.
Could the School of Truth already possess crucial clues about Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum?
Mr. K continued, "We're investigating these matters, as is Element Dawn.
"We recently discovered Moran Avigny's involvement in some cases. He seemed to be a key figure in the School of Truth."
"Then why assassinate him instead of capturing him?" Lumian felt Mr. K's previous actions aimed to kill Moran Avigny.

Mr. K chuckled raspily.
"Killing him is simpler than capture. And after his death, an abnormality will undoubtedly occur. The official Beyonders will find a way to communicate with his spirit. Then, the authorities will investigate the School of Truth to thwart their plan.
"Isn't that our goal?
"Plus, we can shadow the authorities to track down School of Truth members."
You, an Aurora Order Oracle, have also learned to "report" and exploit the authorities? Lumian found it amusing.
If not for needing more information about the Mirror People, he, Franca, and the others could have simply forced Moran Avigny to show signs of abnormality, avoiding so much trouble.
Lumian delved into more details with Mr. K, increasingly sensing the School of Truth was close to locating Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum.
Without delay, he expressed his urgency to return and interrogate Moran Avigny to prevent mishaps.
"Do you need my help?" Mr. K inquired.
Lumian responded with a smile, "Not for now. We have a Hypnotist, the Bliss Society's truth serum, and a Demoness skilled in spirit channeling."
He didn't mention also having Fate Appropriator abilities.
During Fate Appropriation, Lumian could "see" all of Moran Avigny's past and present fates, and most fate tributaries. But the duration was limited, only allowing extraction of the most pertinent information.
"Alright, let me know if you need anything." Mr. K sized up Lumian with admiration.
...
Finding a secluded spot to teleport back to the safe house, Lumian surveyed the area and said to Franca, "Use Mirror Cufflink's ability to take us back to the underground quarry cave."
This would prevent accidents from affecting the neighborhood.
Lumian had already teleported multiple times that day and even altered Moran Avigny's fate. Previously, he had played the Symphony of Hatred and triggered a series of weakness assaults. The immense expenditure left him with spirituality for only seven to eight more teleports and no further accumulation.
In this situation, using Beyonder items when possible was only natural.
Understanding Lumian's state, Franca didn't hold back on the Mirror Cufflink's charges. She only asked Lumian to carry the colossal dog and keep it from touching her.

She then made the glass cufflink on her blouse glow, leading Lumian and the others into the room's mirror. Through the dark, empty tunnel, they appeared in the quarry cave with a fixed entrance to the mirror world.

Franca took out the truth serum and tossed it to Anthony Reid with a friendly smile. "Feed some to Moran Avigny and have a good chat with him."

Chapter 723: Secret of Immortality

After some time had passed, Anthony Reid guided the shriveled brownish-yellow dog back to the quarry cave that housed a fixed entrance to the mirror world.

Turning to Lumian, he said, "You can dispel the Animal Creation Spell now."

Lumian glanced at the enormous dog, which had lost its ferocious and ruthless demeanor. With a smile, he recited the dispelling incantation in Hermes: "Monk!"

Lumian had personally crafted the ritualistic dog skin. While he had used Padre Guillaume Bénet's activation incantation, he had modified the dispelling incantation.

Initially, Lumian wanted to use the name of Gehrman Sparrow, one of his two idols, as the dispelling incantation. However, since Gehrman was Mr. Fool's Angel of Redemption, uttering his name in Hermes might have unusual consequences and seem blasphemous. Consequently, Lumian discarded that idea.

Since the first ritualistic hide he made was dog skin, Lumian drew inspiration from the phrase "Monks Chasing Dogs" and chose the word "Monk" for the dispelling incantation.

As a dark light flared, it revealed a pitiful-looking Moran Avigny.

Instinctively, Moran reached for a handkerchief in his chest pocket and wiped away the dried blood, tears, saliva, and mucus from his face.

Rather than getting directly to the point, Lumian decided to begin with trivial questions to bolster his credibility and optimize the hypnotic effect.

With a blend of derision and a sigh, he said, "I can't grasp why you Mirror People loathe your real world equivalents."

Moran Avigny sneered in response. "If you were perpetually confined to the cold, gloomy, sealed mirror, you'd also despise your counterpart who basks in the sun, savors fine food and drink, and revels in leisure and pleasure."

"But your existence wasn't a natural occurrence. It was an accident," Jenna pointed out, narrowly avoiding mentioning that they were monstrosities inhabiting a unique mirror world.

Chuckling, Moran Avigny retorted, "What bearing does that have on our envy and hatred?

"We didn't trigger the accident. As we were born and have been perpetuating our kind, we possess the right to seek a superior life."

Momentarily at a loss for words, Franca and Jenna fell silent.

Speaking in a friendly tone, Lumian said, "You indeed have that right. However, it cannot involve murder or injuring the original

body. Why not collaborate with official organizations, such as the Church of The Fool? After fleeing Fourth Epoch Trier, you could depart this city and commence a new life elsewhere."
Moran Avigny scoffed. "You believe we can trust and cooperate with these sun-dwelling organizations?"
"Are you not already collaborating with the School of Truth?" Lumian exposed Moran Avigny's deception.
After a brief pause, Moran Avigny stated, "We have a mission. We desire the authentic restoration of this world."
"Authentic?" Lumian intentionally provoked. "How can authenticity exist in a mirror? You Mirror People merely resemble the genuine ones. Upon death, you will revert to mirror shards."
Following the provocation, Lumian's eyes turned silver-black as he examined Moran Avigny's fate tributary, aiming to deter him from providing a response that could endanger his life.
After a quick observation confirming that his question wouldn't pose a significant risk, Lumian deactivated the Eye of Calamity to preserve his spirituality.
With a meaningful smile, Moran Avigny said, "No, in a certain sense, what resides in the mirror is real.
"Upon completing our mission, we will fully return to reality!"
Intrigued by Moran Avigny's confidence, Franca asked, "Why do you say that?"
Moran Avigny's gaze swept over the two Demonesses. Now in his refractory period, he chuckled and said, "Even I cannot comprehend the most basic reason. All I can disclose is that it relates to the Chaos Demoness we revere deep within the mirror world. She is the true Primordial Demoness!
"Moreover, I can offer an example: After transforming into a Witch and interacting with mirror magic, every Demoness's true self dwells within the mirror."
Observing Franca and Jenna's skepticism, Moran Avigny, eager to express his thoughts, inquired with a smile,
"Are you aware of the Demoness pathway's Sequence 3 name?"
In unison, Franca and Jenna shook their heads. "No."
With a slight nod, Moran Avigny explained, "It's known as the Demoness of Unaging. Eternal youth, skilled in resurrection and rebirth.
"Why are they so challenging to kill, capable of resurrection and rebirth? It's because what they destroy is merely their external form. Their authentic selves have always been imprisoned and sealed within the mirror!
"If the false ones perish, they can swiftly be resurrected through the projection of their true selves in the mirror!

"Consider this: how can one's true self, imprisoned, sealed, and utilized as a source of resurrection, not despise the false one in reality? Why wouldn't they yearn to escape the mirror and reclaim what is rightfully theirs?"

Franca abruptly recalled the moment she first entered the unique mirror world.

At that time, she had encountered her body's original self, the one with thick brown eyebrows and short flaxen-colored hair before ingesting the Witch potion. His face was drenched in blood, and his eyes brimmed with malice and hatred.

Could it be that after drinking the Witch potion and transforming into a woman, her male self didn't disappear but was exiled to the mirror, unable to escape? Franca was both alarmed and suspicious.

Jenna also remembered something from her past.

During the process of becoming a Witch, she saw her other self in an illusion—her malevolent, mirror-like self. Both of them plummeted into the black flames, and she struggled to crawl out, returning to the ice above the black flames to complete her advancement. The malevolent self was dragged into the bottomless Abyss by the python-like black shadow.

Could it symbolize self-division?

Is a part of me truly suffering in the mirror?

Noticing his two Demoness companions' perplexed state, Lumian smiled at Moran Avigny and said, "It doesn't necessarily involve self-imprisonment. It's conceivable that during the Witch transformation process, they formed a profound connection with their mirror selves, enabling them to master mirror magic. To a degree, this also allows for their resurrection."

"The mirror self is tainted with blood, malice, hatred, and malevolence because they are perpetually in this state. They constantly envy their real selves, just like you Mirror People from a unique world."

Unable to uncover the truth at the moment, Lumian preferred not to linger on the subject and attempted to shift the blame to others.

Furthermore, as a Mirror Person, Moran Avigny had an innate inclination to take sides. His words needed to be cautiously accepted and analyzed from a different perspective.

Upon hearing Lumian's explanation, Franca and Jenna's expressions softened. Moran Avigny mocked, "Self-deception cannot conceal the truth."

Recognizing that the initial preparations were nearly complete, Lumian decided to redirect the conversation back to the main topic.

Originally, their objective was related to Mirror People, but now Lumian sensed that the matter involving the School of Truth was more relevant and pressing. He needed to inquire about it first.
His eyes turned silver-black once more as he gazed at Moran Avigny and asked, "Did you enter into a contract with the School of Truth's Overseer?"
"Of course we did. How else could we collaborate? We all value contracts," Moran Avigny replied with pride.
Lumian chuckled.
"He didn't surreptitiously modify the terms the instant you signed the contract, did he?"
"No, I am highly attentive to such matters. As you know, I am a Judge in the mystical sense," Moran Avigny responded confidently.
Lumian probed further, "Have you met the Overseer?"
Moran Avigny shook his head.
"He signed the contract first and then dispatched his subordinate to deliver it. We never actually met."
"What has the Overseer been up to lately?" Lumian inquired cautiously.
Moran Avigny chuckled.
"I am merely a cog of his immense Under the Table black net. I assist in completing specific matters through transactions. I am unaware of what those matters allude to or the motivations behind them.
"Yes, he once mentioned that he intended to use individuals like me to weave an invisible and massive vortex. He could infuse his strongest desires into it and achieve results.
"A few days ago, he casually remarked that the vortex is on the verge of taking shape."
The vortex is about to take shape... Lumian continued to monitor the changes in Moran Avigny's fate tributary and, after some contemplation, asked, "How do you and the Overseer typically communicate? Is there a special contingency plan in case of an emergency?"
This was something he needed to ascertain as quickly as possible. The abrupt attack on Intis's Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny, and his enigmatic disappearance was breaking news. It wouldn't take long for the news to spread. When that happened, the Overseer would undoubtedly learn about it and promptly sever his original communication channel.
...
In Moran Avigny's villa.
Angoulême de François, the captain of the Purifier mobile team directly under Trier's diocese, had been prepared and swiftly

arrived at the scene.
After listening to the on-scene Purifiers' report and assessing the scene, Angoulême frowned.
"A member of the Aurora Order?"
Not Hidden Blade and the others?
What are they up to!
Following a moment of reflection, Angoulême issued an order,
"Let's first suppress the news of Moran Avigny's incident to avoid alerting the individuals and factions behind this abnormality. We may still have an opportunity to uncover clues and proceed with our investigation."
This was his experience and a process the Purifiers were already familiar with.

Chapter 724: Leader

The Purifier team from Saint Vièvе Cathedral soon arrived at Moran Avigny's study, carrying a nearly sealed wooden box.

They each wore white robes adorned with waxed golden threads, thin rubber gloves, and leather hoods. Their masks curved downward, forming a bird's beak in front of their mouths and noses.

Angoulême signaled the other Purifiers to withdraw from this floor and clear the adjacent ones. Donning a bird-beak mask and similar attire himself, he tightly bandaged his wrists and ankles.

Peering through the red glass lenses of his mask, Angoulême watched his colleagues open the wooden box.

Mirrors of the perfect size lined the inner layer of the box on all sides—top, bottom, left, right, front, and back.

In the center, surrounded by the mirrors, stood a milky-white stone statue half the height of a person. It portrayed a beautiful half-naked woman, her dress torn away to the waist.

Despite the female figurine's broken arm, her other hand alluringly covered her navel. Her captivating figure and exquisite facial features stirred an inexplicable heat within Angoulême. A sudden urge to kiss "her" flooded his mind, a desire for an intimate encounter with the stone statue.

Not daring to breathe deeply, he forced himself to maintain control.

He recognized this as a Grade 1 Sealed Artifact under the Trier diocese, serial number 82, known as the Ullamos Statue.

This Grade 1 Sealed Artifact could gradually entice nearby creatures to obsess over it, spreading various illnesses, some common and others mystical in nature.

Left unchecked, the statue's influence would transform its surroundings into a nightmarish landscape of agony—living beings wailing, writhing, and perishing in horrifying ways. The relentless plague would expand, unleashing a widening catastrophe.

Angoulême had requested 1-82 for its ability to guide other creatures into the mirror world. Strictly controlling exposure time was crucial to prevent the spread of illness and obsession.

The two Purifiers gently lifted the Ullamos Statue and carried it to the full-body mirror in the study.

Angoulême and his two other teammates approached, placing their palms on 1-82's shoulders.

In perfect synchronicity, they magically phased through the glass mirror, vanishing from Moran Avigny's study.

As soon as Angoulême laid eyes on the dark, hazy, almost illusory space behind the mirror, a tickle in his throat urged him to cough.
"Sigh..." A soft exhalation escaped his lips.
Their attire couldn't isolate the disease spread by the Ullamos Statue...
Its sole purpose was to minimize the rate at which they succumbed to genuine infection!
Weakened yet inexplicably excited, Angoulême and his teammates investigated the area behind the mirror. They quickly discovered numerous dim mirror fragments scattered about.
"A battle took place here. Moran Avigny had to use Mirror Substitution multiple times, but there's no sign of blood, bodily fluids, hair, or any other traces," one of the Purifiers concluded.
Angoulême's heart raced as he speculated. A battle? Someone ambushed Moran Avigny in the mirror?
Impressive, Hidden Blade!
"It seems Moran Avigny couldn't escape right away and multiple Mirror Substitutions were shattered. There's a high chance he was captured," Angoulême analyzed seriously before pivoting to misdirection. "I see. The Aurora Order never expected the assassination to succeed. The assassin's only objective was to drive Moran Avigny into this mirror, where the rest of the Aurora Order awaited him!"
The other Purifiers concurred with this theory, nodding in agreement.
"Definitely the Aurora Order."
"They even utilized a potent item capable of accessing the mirror world to confront Moran Avigny."
"The absence of gruesome scenes suggests the Aurora Order aimed to capture Moran Avigny alive and extract vital information."
"Over the past five to six years, the Aurora Order has grown more intelligent..."
Following a short discussion, one of the Purifiers glanced back at the Ullamos Statue at the entrance and gulped.
"We need to leave now. Return 1-82 to the mirror box. I can't endure it any longer."
Angoulême agreed.
Back in the real world, they sealed 1-82 once more and removed their cumbersome attire. At last, he sighed with relief, feeling utterly exhausted in both body and mind.
...
Inside the quarry cave with a stable mirror world entrance,illuminated by the carbide lamp under the Eye of Calamity's gaze, Moran Avigny smiled as he answered Lumian's

question,
"Also through a mirror."
While speaking, he retrieved a makeup mirror from his pocket and elaborated, "Every mirror in the mirror world is unique, each with its own corresponding coordinates. I provided him with my mirror's coordinates, and he reciprocated with the coordinates of a mirror on his side. With this arrangement, I can harness my abilities and the mirror world to transmit information to his mirror for a set duration. He contacts me in the same manner but relies on the Beyonder item I gave him."
"An IP address, I suppose..." Franca muttered in a language unfamiliar to anyone present.
Lumian smiled warmly and inquired, "Would you be willing to share the Overseer's mirror coordinates with us?"
Moran Avigny shook his head.
"It's indescribable and impossible to write down. Only those like us from the mirror world can perceive it. Or Demonesses with godhood—Demonesses of Despair."
Sequence 4 Demoness of Despair? And Sequence 5 is Demoness of Affliction... These two Sequences sound unpleasant. Uncomfortable to act, but the subsequent Demoness of Unaging is quite impressive... Franca gleaned information about the Demoness pathway from Moran Avigny's words.
"How can the Overseer perceive it then?" Jenna asked.
Moran Avigny smiled.
"He can't perceive it either, but his Beyonder item can record and use it."
Franca smiled and raised her sleeve, revealing the glass-like Mirror Cufflink.
Taken aback, Moran Avigny's expression shifted to one of relief.
"You're the ones who killed Jebus."
"The Overseer killed him," Lumian clarified sincerely. "We had no intention of killing him. We even wanted to befriend him, but the Overseer used a mysterious power from afar to end his life. I fear you may suffer the same fate."
Moran Avigny fell silent for a few moments before stating, "It can record it."
He referred to the Mirror Cufflink's ability to record the Overseer mirror's coordinates.
Franca wasn't surprised at all. "I knew it would work."
When she had used the Mirror Cufflink earlier, she realized the mirrors in the mirror world gave her a crystal-clear sense of the mirror world's entrances in the vicinity. There was the full-body mirror in Moran Avigny's study and a few other unknown mirrors.

Franca suspected the Mirror Cufflink would instinctively record the corresponding coordinates of each mirror.
Moran Avigny continued, "You won't be able to find the Overseer directly through that mirror. I've long suspected the mirror is actually with one of the Overseer's subordinates. Naturally, that subordinate must be very close to the Overseer. Otherwise, it would hinder the transmission of information."
Just like many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, the contact points reserved for Madame Hela's messenger are isolated from their real lives... Lumian nodded slightly and said, "That's not an issue. We can visit them one by one, as long as they're truly close. Can you provide us with those coordinates?"
Moran Avigny fell silent. The effects of hypnosis and truth serum battled fiercely against his resolve.
This was a Disciplinary Paladin's principle and corresponding restrictions.
Observing the shifts in his fate tributary, Lumian smiled and said, "You can think it over. Let's discuss something else first."
Having witnessed Moran Avigny's potential loss of control, he intended to inquire about other information. If the other party refused to divulge it later, he would kill him before channeling his spirit!
"Very well." Moran Avigny let out a lengthy sigh.
Lumian pondered briefly and asked,
"What deals did the Overseer make with you?"
Moran Avigny responded nonchalantly, "Primarily providing assistance to certain individuals. In turn, I received help through the Overseer. Consequently, we elevated our political status and acquired more resources.
"This is a common practice among politicians, but with the Overseer, it's even more covert, less detectable, and effective.
"Additionally, protecting specific individuals or indirectly granting benefits to non-high society members to fulfill the requirements on the other side of the Overseer's Under the Table transaction."
Lumian considered for a moment and asked, "Didn't that Overseer communicate with the leader of your Mirror People?"
Unsure if the Mirror People had a de facto leader, he said this to deceive Moran Avigny, implying they already possessed important information.
If the Mirror People truly lacked a de facto leader, Moran Avigny would see through the deception. With the truth serum and hypnosis, this wouldn't affect his subsequent answers.
Moran Avigny's expression shifted slightly. "He did communicate with our leader."

"How did they communicate?" Lumian asked calmly.
"Through a provided ritual. I don't know what was exchanged as I wasn't present," Moran Avigny replied honestly.
Franca asked curiously, "Is your leader in the real world or the mirror world of Fourth Epoch Trier?"
"In Fourth Epoch Trier," Moran Avigny said with a sigh. "Mirror People with powerful godhood can't escape through certain catastrophes via the leakage point."
Franca pondered for a moment and asked, "Does your leader have a corresponding self in reality?"
"Yes." Moran Avigny smiled. "You'll never guess who it is."

Chapter 725: The Mirror World's Third Level

"We'll never guess who it is?" Lumian and Franca scoffed simultaneously, pretending to be eager to speculate.

Of course, they didn't make any direct guesses immediately. They planned to gather some information indirectly first before making a targeted guess.

Lumian noticed the change in Moran Avigny's fate tributary and realized that as a Disciplinary Paladin, the man had his own principles and mystical limitations. He wouldn't willingly reveal details about the Mirror People's leader, yet he couldn't completely suppress a desire to share--unable to resist the hypnotic influence. So, he taunted them in a boastful way.

"You mentioned Mirror People with powerful godhood can't escape through catastrophes via leakage points, not just any Mirror People with godhood," Lumian pointed out with a smile, interpreting Moran Avigny's words. "So in other words, a Mirror Person corresponding to Sequence 4 has escaped, and your leader is a Mirror Person of at least Sequence 3 demigod level?"

Moran Avigny's face instantly showed annoyance as he regretted being too detailed, realizing he had inadvertently revealed critical information.

Encouraged by Lumian's astute observation, Franca smiled and asked, "Where are the escaped Sequence 4 Mirror People now? What are they doing?"

Moran Avigny's lips trembled with clear effort, but he stayed quiet.

Just as expected from a Sequence 5 Disciplinary Paladin. They're experts at resisting interrogation and prying... I wonder if destroying his frontal lobe would make him lose that last bit of self-control... Lumian wondered to himself and switched to a less sensitive subject.

"What are the requirements for Mirror People to appear?

"Does everyone who has lived in the real Trier for a long time automatically have a corresponding Mirror Person? Or do they need exposure to certain underground corruption first?"

This question was based on inferences from the Dream Festival incident.

Phew... Moran Avigny let out a relieved sigh, having almost lost control and spilled the most critical secrets moments earlier.

The current question let him relax a little. He answered smoothly, "If not for the seal specifically targeting Fourth Epoch Trier, the mirror world there would contain a complete reflection of the real Trier, including every resident. But under this seal, only those who frequently go into the underground areas and come into contact

with specific corruption will leave an imprint in our mirror realm.
"Other than that, our kind has other origins too:
"The first type are descendants of a false deity. The corresponding Mirror People manifest from the moment of their birth, regardless of location or whether they've ever been to Trier.
"The second category comes from the bloodlines of certain noble families in Fourth Epoch Trier, like descendants of the Tamara family. That's how I came to be. This isn't limited by location or environment."
Lumian and the others understood that the false deity he was talking about was Primordial Demoness Cheek. As an evil deity overseeing the mirror world, it made sense that Her descendants would have close ties to that unique realm.
"Why do descendants of the Tamara family have a special connection to your mirror world?" Lumian asked curiously. "Did your ancestors suffer the relevant corruption during the War of the Four Emperors, or even earlier?"
Moran Avigny paused for a few moments before replying, "Earlier. I'm not sure of the specifics of the corruption or how it occurred, as it was too long ago. Maybe those Tamaras who follow the Judgment pathway without being Mirror People themselves, or those of the Door pathway, have records of it."
The Door pathway was another name for the Apprentice pathway.
Lumian nodded and asked on behalf of Franca and Jenna, "Does your kind exclude Mirror People of other Demonesses?"
"They are Mirror People, but not from our world," Moran Avigny answered with a smile. "Of course, if the conditions I mentioned earlier are met, a Mirror Person corresponding to a Demoness could be born in our realm too."
I see... Franca and Jenna nodded slightly as Lumian changed the topic.
"What are the Mirror People who left the underground doing?"
His question was broad, not specifically referring to the godhood-level Mirror People. Moran Avigny struggled for a moment before responding, "Most of them stay in Trier. They either use the original's identity to advance their status in various industries and organizations, or they hide in the shadows, secretly developing their factions. The goal is to eventually fully unseal Fourth Epoch Trier and access the third, deepest level of the mirror world.
"As for the rest..."
Moran Avigny paused and grinned at Franca and Jenna.
"Some infiltrated the Demoness Sect to locate the fake deity's real-world hiding place. Others went to Lenburg to search for an item, as instructed by the leader.

"Don't ask me about the progress of those in the Demoness Sect or what exactly the ones in Lenburg are looking for. That's not my area of responsibility. No one told me the details."
"I also want to find the Primordial Demoness's real-world hiding spot. Why not tell me about the infiltrators in the Demoness Sect? Maybe we could work together," Franca suggested with a lovely smile.
Moran Avigny's expression said it all: The more beautiful the woman, the more deceptive. I won't fall for it.
"I don't know their identities either. Only the leader has all the information."
"Alright then." Franca's eyes darted around as she continued, "What did you mean by the third level of the mirror world? We've all gone into Fourth Epoch Trier and entered your special mirror realm. But what we encountered there were Mirror People of the deceased citizens from that ancient era. They were reflections of that bygone city. Where does your kind live?"
Moran Avigny explained, "Back then, you must have accessed the second level of our mirror world. It only appears under specific conditions and preserves the scene of Fourth Epoch Trier's destruction. It's quite dangerous and holds many unknown secrets. As for our daily life, we live on the first level of the mirror world--a reflection of the present-day Trier."
"The first level mirrors the current Trier?" Jenna keenly noticed a discrepancy. "Didn't you say you Mirror People live in a dark, cold, confined environment?"
Trier was now a metropolis!
Moran Avigny sneered and said, "We may seem to live in a metropolis, but in reality, we are all restricted. We can only walk fixed paths, endlessly wandering between a handful of rooms and one or two streets. Without the help of godhood- level powerhouses, we can't even talk to each other. We can only observe what our counterparts are doing in the real world through mirrors. Plus, our realm has no reflection of the sun, moon, or stars. Imagine living in such an environment."
It's similar to the living conditions of the painting world's individuals, except the Mirror People have self- awareness and a clear understanding... No wonder they are in agony... Lumian thought of a question when he realized the mirror world's first level lacked the sun, moon, and stars.
"If a Sequence 4 Unshadowed of the Sun pathway comes into contact with the specific underground corruption, will a corresponding Mirror Person be born?"
"No," Moran Avigny stated firmly.

Lumian used this chance to eliminate several more possibilities regarding the real identity of the Mirror People's leader.
Franca sighed deeply. "The Sun pathway is truly exceptional. Befitting of the pathway that governs Purification."
She then remembered her earlier unanswered question and pressed, "What exists on the third level of the mirror world?"
Once again, Moran Avigny shook his head.
"No one has entered it. We only know it exists. We know our origins, traits, and the source of our power all point to that
level. As for the Chaos Demoness we revere and follow, who is also the Primordial Demoness, She is trapped there for some reason, guarding the truth."
Trapped there? More like sealed there... 'Protecting reality'—a nice way to spin it... Lumian pondered briefly before asking, "What truth are you referring to?"
"Truth is truth." Moran Avigny seemed confused, as if he had never seriously considered the matter.
Seeing that he lacked an answer, Jenna brought the conversation back to the Mirror People's connection to reality.
Puzzled, she asked, "If the original person in reality dies, what happens to the Mirror Person?
"And the other way around?"
Moran Avigny's lips twisted into a warped smile.
"Normally, if the me in reality dies, I'll die along with him. But if I send my real self into the mirror world beforehand, the impact of his death on me will be minimal.
"The reverse holds true too. When I was still in the mirror world, if an invader killed me, the me in reality would merely get sick and be weakened for a time. Going forward, if he didn't come into contact with the specific underground corruption again, no corresponding Mirror Person would exist.
"If I escape to the real world and am killed there, the real me won't be affected at all."
Franca hissed and said, "So instead of killing Moran Avigny directly, you found a way to drag him into the mirror world?"
"Exactly. I waited for him to 'savor' the darkness, coldness, isolation, and loneliness before ending him," Moran Avigny confirmed with a smile.
In short, the one in the mirror loses significance and won't impact the other's survival, regardless of whether they are a Mirror Person or a real individual... If both are in the real world, the Mirror Person is naturally at a disadvantage... Lumian nodded slightly as he started to deduce the identity of the Mirror People's leader mentioned by Moran Avigny.

Someone who ventures into Trier's underground often, exposed to specific corruptions.
Formidable godhood, at least Sequence 3.
He must still be alive...
With this in mind, Lumian couldn't narrow it down further.
He had no choice but to use his Conspirer abilities to upload all relevant information onto his mental network.
The Overseer of the School of Truth had performed a ritual and interacted with the Mirror People's leader.
The School of Truth was searching for Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum.
They had obtained something significant. The vortex was on the verge of taking shape...
Suddenly, a flash of insight hit Lumian, and an incredible guess raced through his mind.
He couldn't be certain, as one premise seemed questionable.
He took two steps forward and whispered a name into Moran Avigny's ear.
Moran Avigny's expression changed drastically, a mixture of shock and panic.
Lumian withdrew and exhaled solemnly.
"Have you figured out who the Mirror People's leader is?" Franca asked.
Lumian nodded gently and surveyed the surroundings. In a deep voice, he declared, "Yes, I know who He is. He's Roselle Gustav in the mirror!"

Chapter 726: Fragment of Fate

Roselle Gustav in the mirror?

When Franca, Jenna, and Anthony heard that the name of this dazzling figure, revered by every Intisian, was connected to the Mirror People, their minds went completely blank.

They instinctively wanted to question him further, but Moran Avigny's reaction and change in expression appeared to validate Lumian's conjecture.

"But the Emperor has been dead for over a century. How can there still be a corresponding Mirror Person?" Franca asked, finally composing herself.

It made sense that Emperor Roselle would have encountered Trier's underground corruption. He had, after all, lived in Trier for an extended period after reaching adulthood, and he was not one to easily settle down. He had seized control of Intis, reformed Trier, expanded the city, and initiated the patriotic health campaign, but hadn't he already met his end?

Lumian's serious expression softened a bit.

"Initially, I hesitated to make that guess, but then I recalled something. For someone of Emperor Roselle's stature, even if they perish, they might not be completely gone. There could even be a possibility of resurrection."

It was just like Naboredisley's Abomination corpse resting in the ancient tomb of the Dream Festival.

Franca made an odd remark. "Old institutions are hard to get rid of..."

With their experience dealing with the Devil Monarch's Abomination corpse, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony quickly accepted Lumian's explanation.

Lumian looked at Moran Avigny, whose face had turned ashen, and smiled.

"I made a bold hypothesis and meticulously verified it. When I shared my guess with him, he willingly confirmed it."

Moran Avigny's lips trembled, wanting to defend himself, but he held back.

He believed that the more he tried to explain, the more he would end up helping these people.

His urge to confide led him to add, "Now, do you understand that our Mirror People are also incredibly powerful?

"If we can fully break the seal of Fourth Epoch Trier, we will be as strong as any orthodox Church!"

Franca disregarded Moran Avigny's showy remark and muttered to herself, "No wonder the Church's demigods refuse to personally go

underground and resolve the various abnormalities here unless the seal of Fourth Epoch Trier is badly damaged.
"This isn't about fixing abnormalities. It's about making more of them!"
Even though the demigods of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church didn't have to fear the birth of their corresponding Mirror People, Trier's underground corruption extended beyond just the mirror world!
Isn't the underground of Trier excessively vile and horrifying?
This was assuming that Fourth Epoch Trier was relatively well-sealed. What had the four Emperors, particularly Blood Emperor Alista Tudor, done during the War of the Four Emperors? The issues they left behind more than a thousand years ago were still incredibly terrifying!
We often venture into Trier's underground and have even entered Fourth Epoch Trier and the unique mirror world. *Could there be a corresponding special Mirror Person?*
No, it's not a matter of whether there is one, but rather that there definitely was one. They had encountered it before!
Lumian ignored Moran Avigny's boasting and turned to Jenna.
"Our investigation into the Mirror People has yielded significant progress. Combined with the Overseer, who evidently possesses godhood, what unfolds next is beyond our ability to intervene. As soon as we acquire the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror, promptly report the entire situation."
Jenna curtly acknowledged his words and laughed self-deprecatingly.
"Actually, I'm dying to report it now."
From her viewpoint, although she was unsure why the School of Truth was searching for Emperor Roselle's final mausoleum or what their intentions were, given the strong probability that they had already obtained vital information and collaborated with the mirror Roselle, the situation had obviously become very urgent, and it was certainly not a positive development.
"You can begin writing now." Lumian gave a slight nod and shifted his gaze to Moran Avigny.
He planned to appropriate the other party's fate.
Fate Appropriation was not his objective. By seizing the chance to interact with fate, his aim was to seek essential information from past fate fragments.
This was the penultimate segment of the "interrogation."
The final segment involved spirit channeling to forcibly obtain the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror!
Furthermore, Lumian wanted to take this opportunity to observe what would happen to the target if he seized one of their fate

fragments without exchanging fates or directly causing their death.
This was not mentioned in the mystical knowledge possessed by a Fate Appropriator. The only thing Lumian knew for certain was that the past would not change, and what had already transpired would remain unchanged.
Initially, Lumian had wanted to inquire further about the Mirror People who maintained contact with Moran Avigny and their positions. However, the urgency of the situation led him to postpone this matter to the spirit channeling part. In any case, it wasn't particularly crucial.
From Lumian's perspective, it was more important to know the identities of the Mirror People who had infiltrated the Demoness Sect and who had gone to Lenburg in search of an item. However, Moran Avigny clearly had no knowledge of this.
Lumian suspected that the Mirror People who had gone to Lenburg were looking for clues about 0-01. After all, based on the information, this item likely had a close connection to Blood Emperor Alista Tudor. The method of sealing it was quite similar to sealing Fourth Epoch Trier. It might be of great significance to the Mirror People from the special mirror world in Fourth Epoch Trier.
Lumian extended his right palm and pressed it against Moran Avigny from a distance.
His blue eyes rapidly turned silver-black.
Moran Avigny was perplexed by Lumian's strange behavior.
Although he possessed the strength of a Sequence 5, he had been actively involved in politics for the past decade or so. He maintained a certain distance from the mysticism domain and the emerging cults. This was particularly true after becoming the Minister of Industry. He relied entirely on the connections within the Mirror People and the Brokers of the School of Truth to acquire the knowledge, information, and items he desired. Direct contact with wild Beyonders was uncommon, so he naturally couldn't discern Lumian's intentions. He only instinctively believed that Lumian had ulterior motives and wasn't simply acting.
Lumian's right palm "touched" the mercury illusory river corresponding to Moran Avigny.
The life of the Mirror Person flashed before his eyes, and various fate fragments surged along the river.
Lumian couldn't discern them in detail. Seizing the brief span of two to three seconds, he focused on observing two fate fragments.
One fate fragment depicted how Moran Avigny remotely instructed the School of Truth's Overseer to perform a ritual through the

mirror, establishing a connection with the Mirror Roselle Gustav.
The other aspect was how this Mirror Person came into being.
In the previous fate segment, Lumian witnessed Moran Avigny stuffing a classic silver mirror into his makeup mirror and lending it to the Overseer.
At the source of the mercury river of fate, the 17- or 18-year-old Mirror Moran Avigny swiftly materialized in the dark and cold room, his expression naturally sinister.
The classic silver mirror bears a striking resemblance to the one Franca found at the overflow of corruption in the mirror world. She had relied on the latter to enter Fourth Epoch Trier during Operation Hostel... *Could such a mirror be closely tied to the Mirror People?*
Didn't Moran Avigny say that the descendants of the Tamara family naturally have a corresponding Mirror Person? Why wasn't he a baby when he was born as a Mirror Person? The descendants of the Tamara family must reach a certain age or have done something specific to produce the corresponding Mirror People? He doesn't seem to understand what's going on either...
As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian didn't allow the Fate Appropriation attempt to end naturally and result in failure. He seized the moment and grasped a fate fragment in his right hand. Through the spew of his spirituality, he slowly extracted the abnormally heavy target from the mercury-
colored illusory river.
The fate fragment corresponded to the scene of Moran Avigny's lust exploding under the Symphony of Hatred.
As time passed, Franca and Jenna asked about the other Mirror People to divert Moran Avigny's attention, and the fate fragment finally left the mercury river.
Consequently, the hole that had appeared was neither filled nor rewoven. Empty chaos occupied it, emitting a thin fog.
After storing the obtained fate fragments into his Spirit Body, Lumian carefully observed Moran Avigny's transformation.
As he waited, he muttered inwardly, The fact that we caught Moran Avigny remains unchanged...
Him drinking the truth serum and being hypnotized remain unchanged...
We haven't forgotten what he just said...
Yes, this Fate Appropriation took a total of three minutes. The fate fragment depicting his eruption of lust weighs heavily in Moran Avigny's entire life. After all, it caused his fate to take a sharp turn for the worse...
Appropriation requires a distance of 15 meters. Obtaining the

target's blood is unnecessary...
While stirring fate and waiting for completion, I can't attack the target, but I can stay away...
It's more convenient to kill him directly. The Appropriation can be completed in a matter of seconds...
As Lumian reviewed, Moran Avigny's weakened aura gradually filled up, and his face flushed.
The bloodstains and tears on his face vanished.
Yes, there was no eruption of lust, so no severe injuries... Lumian harrumphed as Moran Avigny's face lit up with pleasant surprise.
Two beams of white light struck Moran Avigny, knocking him unconscious.
Simultaneously, Jenna and Franca, who had been closely monitoring Lumian's movements, aimed their revolvers at the yet-to-collapse Moran Avigny's head.
Amidst the gunshots, the Disciplinary Paladin's head exploded like blood-colored fireworks.
Lumian didn't complain about Franca and Jenna not giving him a chance to cull. He didn't want to waste his spirituality on Culling. When he appeared at the last moment and used the Symphony of Hatred to shatter Moran Avigny's remaining Mirror Substitution and capture him, he felt as if the potion had digested somewhat due to the successful cull.
Thud!
Moran Avigny's lifeless body crumpled to the ground, and Franca prepared to channel the spirit.

Chapter 727: Arrival

As Franca prepared the ritual, she considered her options and said to Lumian, "The Overseer's mirror coordinates are indescribable and can only be procured through mystical means. The Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell isn't capable of that. I intend to use standard spirit channeling instead."

While the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell she had developed greatly extended the duration of the channeling and the number of questions the spirit would respond to, it was constrained by relying on the mirror as a medium, forfeiting the chance for other types of interaction.

"Regular spirit channeling drastically restricts the intel we can gather..." Lumian thought briefly and said, "For the first question, we should have him provide the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror. Second, ask about the whereabouts of the classic silver mirror utilized for the ritual and leader communication. Third, inquire about the identities and locations of the Mirror People in contact with him, ranked by importance."

Once the third question was answered, the spirit channeling ritual would come to its natural conclusion. Lumian suspected Moran Avigny might not have time to "introduce" every Mirror Person under his command. Hence, he asked for them to be prioritized based on the criticality of their role and responsibilities.

"A classic silver mirror?" Franca asked, puzzled.

"Yes, Moran Avigny has a mirror akin to the classic silver one you used to own. It's vital for communicating with Mirror Roselle," Lumian explained succinctly.

While speaking, he crouched and rummaged through Moran Avigny's pockets.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Industry carried only a handful of large bills and some loose change totaling 3,212 verl d'or.

Besides the money, there was an elegant golden mechanical pocket watch, a meticulously embroidered handkerchief, and a wallet crafted by a private designer and artisan.

But not a single item imbued with Beyonder powers!

Lumian couldn't resist mimicking Franca's inner thought: "Poor slob!"

He realized that as the sitting Minister of Industry, Moran Avigny was under the watchful eye of official Beyonders. He was unlikely to carry mystical items, Beyonder weapons, or anything that might reveal his abnormality.

As a Sequence 5 Disciplinary Paladin of the Judgment pathway, disclosing this to the two Churches would raise difficult questions

about how he obtained the potion formula and Beyonder characteristics at that level. When signing the contract, he would at most acknowledge being a Beyonder of a related pathway without specifying the Sequence. This cost him the chance to procure items openly, forcing him to rely on Brokers—something official Beyonders couldn't be privy to.
Moran Avigny didn't require the Overseer's assistance with the Under the Table deal to access mystical items, as Mirror People could transfer objects through mirrors. If he genuinely needed an item for a specific purpose, he could reach out to his mirror world associates and have them "send" it over, returning it promptly after use.
Lumian sighed, pocketed the cash, watch, and other belongings, and rose to his feet.
With Franca's spirit channeling preparations complete, Lumian turned to Jenna, still composing her letter, and asked, "You shot without hesitation earlier. Did it weigh on you at all? This wasn't a battle. We'd been engaged in friendly conversation with Moran Avigny for a while now. I even started to feel like we were becoming friends."
Jenna glanced up at Lumian while writing on a protruding rock of the cave wall. She laughed softly.
"Worried I'll bottle up my emotional turmoil and cause issues down the line? Planning to play psychiatrist and offer me counseling?"
Anthony Reid, who had been observing silently, living up to his role as a Spectator, scratched his nose self-consciously.
That seemed to be his job.
However, he could discern that Jenna and Franca were not in need of counseling.
Lumian didn't tackle Jenna's question head-on. With a smile, he remarked, "You haven't taken many lives yourself."
"Had we not pulled the trigger, would you have taken action? Despite feeling you had befriended Moran Avigny, I think you wouldn't have flinched at blowing his head off," Jenna retorted, a smile playing on her lips.
Lumian let out a derisive snort. "I'm not like you. I've killed more people than I can count."
Jenna met his gaze again. "Moran Avigny admitted to his crimes. He lured the real Moran Avigny into the mirror, holding him captive before ruthlessly ending his life. I felt no qualms about carrying out the execution of a guilty man."
"You've changed..." Lumian let out an exaggerated sigh and quipped, "Once upon a time, you depended on the police and

authorities to punish the bad guys."
Jenna didn't have a chance to respond, as Franca had finished her spirit channeling.
In the wavering dark-green candlelight, Moran Avigny's spirit took shape above his corpse, perceptible to those who had activated their Spirit Vision.
Franca acted swiftly. Withdrawing the glass-like Mirror Cufflink from her sleeve, she addressed Moran Avigny's spirit, "Give me the coordinates of the Overseer's mirror."
Moran Avigny's indistinct, menacing face twisted in anguish.
But stripped of life, he no longer had the ironclad self-control to resist the commanding pull of the spirit channeling. He stretched out his right hand, motioning for Franca to hand over the Mirror Cufflink.
Anticipating this, Franca passed him the Mirror Cufflink.
As Moran Avigny's spirit clutched the cufflink, a shadowy light shimmered across its form, drawn into the glass-like accessory.
Franca exhaled in relief upon the Mirror Cufflink's return.
Having achieved the primary objective, it was time to reap further rewards!
Her mood buoyed, Franca inquired of Moran Avigny with piqued interest, "Is there a functional classic silver mirror in your possession... Hold on..."
Abruptly realizing this constituted a question, she hastily rephrased."Where is the classic silver mirror the Overseer used to facilitate communication with your leader?"
Lumian had already ascertained Moran Avigny didn't have it on him.
Moran Avigny's spirit responded with cold rigidity, "Griffith has it. When I require it, I have him deliver it to me through the mirror."
Franca's initial elation quickly gave way to an exasperated curse.
"Dammit!"
It dawned on her that she couldn't extract Griffith's mirror coordinates from Moran Avigny.
The spirit channeling had but one question remaining. She needed to ask Moran Avigny about the Mirror People serving as their contacts and their true identities. Requesting mirror coordinates was out of the question!
Lumian and Anthony immediately grasped the reason for Franca's self-directed frustration, but they were powerless to intervene. Certain questions hinged on preceding answers, and mirror coordinates couldn't be conveyed through the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell.
Collecting herself, Franca fixed her gaze on Moran Avigny's spirit.

Marshaling her thoughts, she articulated, "Name the Mirror People in contact with you. What roles do they play in the real world? Begin with those of the highest rank and responsibility."
Moran Avigny's ghostly, blurred visage contorted once more. Despite his resistance, he responded in a clipped tone, "First, there's Griffith, who serves as my second-in-command. Originally, he was a key figure in the Moses Ascetic Order. With our assistance, he's steadily elevating his position within the Order. His aspiration is for the secret organization to eventually join the alliance to open Fourth Epoch Trier's seal..."
The Moses Ascetic Order... The very group that clashed with Element Dawn, headed by the Emperor's firstborn, Bernadette? If memory serves, they primarily consist of Mystery Pryer pathway Beyonders... I can't help but wonder if the Research Society has members from either faction. There must be others like myself with multiple secret society affiliations... Franca listened intently, not daring to disrupt Moran Avigny's account.
Moran Avigny proceeded to the second Mirror Person.
"Caratanza Tamara, part of our branch's Tamara family. He enlisted in the military and now holds the rank of colonel. He legitimized his Beyonder powers by slaying a Loen Kingdom spy, seizing their potion formula and Judgment pathway characteristics...
"Palia, a ore scholar originally. She infiltrated the Trier Cave Association to mask our attempts at uncovering a vulnerability in the seal...
"Sport, Trier's Deputy Commissioner of Police and a member of the police commission. His original self was purposely corrupted during an operation. Subsequently, Griffith and Caratanza orchestrated an ambush, dragging him into the mirror and allowing the mirror world's Sport to emerge and assume his place..."
By this point, Moran Avigny's spirit had become increasingly insubstantial, on the brink of dissipation.
At that instant, Jenna concluded her letter and pivoted to face Lumian. "I'll now summon Madam Judgment's messenger."
The words had scarcely left her mouth when an ethereal voice, seemingly originating from a great distance, reverberated in the ears of Jenna, Lumian, and the others.
"Summoning won't be necessary."
A shared premonition compelled Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony to direct their attention to the side of the quarry cave.
In the chamber's dim illumination, supplied only by carbide lamps and candles, dazzling starlight coalesced in the void, rapidly

tracing the outline of an enchanting door.
Noiselessly, the door swung open, revealing an enormous pumpkin carriage drawn by a multitude of gray rats.
Three women occupied the carriage's interior. One was Magician, resplendent in a beige gown with a high collar adorned with golden embroidery. Another was Judgment, her shoulder-length flaxen hair complementing her grayish-white knight's attire, accented by brown leather armor.
The third woman was clad in a purple dress bearing a cryptic pattern. A celestial globe and sundry items dangled from her waist, and refined spectacles perched upon her nose.
Clasped in her left hand was a peculiar lamp, its surface golden like a kettle and adorned with enigmatic designs.

Chapter 728: Tracking

Lumian, Franca, and Jenna's eyes widened as they caught sight of the strange golden lamp, making a bold conjecture.

Could it be 0-05, the Magic Wishing Lamp?

Yes, the pumpkin carriage is one of Major Arcana Ma'am Hermit's trademark symbols. She has close ties to Element Dawn's leader—Emperor Roselle's eldest daughter—and the current owner of 0-05, Bernadette. It isn't outside the realm of possibility that she might have borrowed the Magic Wishing Lamp...

As these thoughts raced through their minds, they heard Anthony's respectful greeting, "Good evening, Madam Magician, Madam Judgment."

Snapping out of their momentary trance, Lumian and the others quickly followed suit with their own greetings.

"And this is Ma'am Hermit," Magician added briefly.

Once the introductions were complete, the woman in the beige dress with a gold-embroidered high collar retrieved a bottle of dark-red wine from the void and said to Franca, "Hand over that cufflink. Once you do, you can all head home and get some rest."

Confronting the School of Truth's Overseer was clearly a battle at the demigod level. It wasn't something Lumian and company could get involved in.

Franca had no intention of forcing the issue. She handed the glass-like cufflink to Madam Magician.

In exchange, Madam Magician gave her the wine bottle containing a faint dark-red liquid.

"This is a mystical item that restores stamina and spirituality after drinking it. But remember, you can only have it once a day. Don't go turning into a drunkard."

Just one more sip and you'll become a drunkard? Franca and the others instantly understood the deeper meaning behind Madam Magician's final warning.

Seeing only a single sip of dark-red wine in the bottle, Franca turned to pass the old glass bottle to Lumian.

He had expended the most spirituality, after all.

Madam Magician rubbed the Mirror Cufflink between her fingers, a smile playing on her lips.

"Don't worry. You won't be able to finish it. It's called Bottomless Wine."

I see... Franca still wanted to give it a shot. She unscrewed the thin metal cap and downed the light dark-red wine.

As the slightly astringent and sweet alcohol slid down her throat, she felt refreshed, as if she'd just had a good night's sleep and

hadn't been in a fierce battle with Moran Avigny.
At the same time, she noticed dark-red liquid seeping from the bottom of the old glass bottle, forming a thin layer of wine.
It really is bottomless... Franca sighed, handing the old glass bottle to Lumian.
But just as she reached out, a sudden sense of unease struck her.
Acting on instinct, she changed course, intending to let Jenna drink first.
Yet upon further reflection, she realized something was even more off!
Because she still had to pass it to Lumian afterward!
Never mind, never mind. No point getting caught up in trivial matters... Franca muttered in her native tongue.
Instead, she circled her finger around the bottle and managed to form a thin layer of frost.
As the frost naturally fell away, Franca passed the Bottomless Wine to Jenna.
Jenna drank the dark-red wine, mimicked Franca's actions, and then handed it to Lumian.
Franca breathed a sigh of relief.
Lumian paid no mind to the Demonesses' odd behavior. He was more concerned about the strange actions of Ma'am Hermit and Madam Magician.
Ma'am Hermit's eyes, obscured by lenses, grew dark but remained unfocused, as if staring into a vast expanse. Countless brilliant specks of light appeared around her, as if she had shrunk the universe and brought it down to the ground.
Performing divination or prophecy before tackling important matters? Lumian took the old glass bottle and drank the dark-red wine.
His spirituality rapidly recovered, as if he'd experienced six in the morning.
Of course, the portion of accumulated spirituality he had used didn't "return."
Phew, Lumian's anxiety over his spirituality deficiency had been alleviated.
After Anthony drank the Bottomless Wine and returned the mystical item to Madam Magician, the Mirror Cufflink's dark glow, mixed with starlight, flew out and landed on the Major Arcana card holder's eye.
Madam Magician sent Mirror Cufflink flying toward Franca while extending her hands, grasping the void, and pulling it apart on either side.
Without a sound, the void ripped open like a transparent

membrane, revealing passageways formed by spiderwebs of emptiness and darkness.
This was a standard mirror world.
Magician had opened an illusory door to the mirror world without using a mirror!
Is this the advanced power of the Apprentice pathway? Lumian and company inwardly marveled. Madam Magician glanced at Ma'am Hermit beside her.
The Hermit, wearing a purple robe, held a vibrant, unreal ball of yarn in her right hand. She wound its thread around the peculiar golden lamp.
Then, the Major Arcana card holder tossed the vivid and illusory ball of yarn through the illusory door Magician had opened, into the mirror world's dark and ethereal tunnels.
The ball of yarn rolled into one of the passageways and quickly vanished into the depths, leaving only the thread connected to the golden lamp to mark its path.
Magician immediately led The Hermit and Judgment into the mirror world, chasing the ball of yarn.
After their figures disappeared from the mirror world, the forcibly torn void rapidly closed.
Franca muttered again, "I think I've heard the story about a yarn ball before, but I can't recall its name..."
Lumian turned his attention back to Moran Avigny's corpse.
"You want to bring him back for your godson to eat?" Franca said with contempt. "Let's not even discuss whether Ludwig should be eating humans in the first place. A Mirror Person's flesh will gradually turn back into mirror fragments. Do you really want Ludwig to be eating glass shards?"
Lumian shook his head.
"I'm considering whether I should take Moran Avigny's makeup mirror."
...
After tracking the vibrant yarn for a while, the three Major Arcana card holders reached a country villa matching the mirror's coordinates and spotted the target mirror on a desk.
It was also a makeup mirror.
They didn't pause. They followed the ball of yarn and walked through the spirit world.
In a mere two to three seconds, they returned to reality and saw the vivid and illusory ball of yarn come to a halt in a dark cathedral lacking a deity's statue.
Beneath the cathedral's dome, humans hung in the air, gently swaying in the wind.

Some were old, some were young, and some were gentlemen wearing half top hats. Some were beautiful ladies in vintage dresses, some were tall and muscular like giants, and some were covered in wet, sticky scales resembling fish...
What they all had in common was their firmly closed eyes, suspended by invisible ropes, looking like hanged corpses.
In the cathedral's depths, a man in his thirties with average facial features and dark hair sat in a wooden black armchair. His aura and soul felt both familiar and unfamiliar to Magician.
It was familiar because she recognized Loki, the head of April Fool's, who had been compelled to exhaust his resurrection times. It was unfamiliar because the other party had been stained with an odd sensation.
At that instant, a blurry female figure stood next to Loki, resembling a sketch. Her eyes were pitch-black, like a lake in the dim night.
He looked at Magician, The Hermit, and Judgment, a smile playing on his lips.
"It's all thanks to you that I found some hope of returning."
Before Loki could finish his sentence, the suspended corpses' eyes snapped open simultaneously.
Those eyes were pitch-black.
...
In the quarry cave with a fixed entrance to the mirror world.
"Taking away Moran Avigny's makeup mirror?" Jenna echoed Lumian's words before a realization struck her. "Do you want to see if any other Mirror People will try to contact Moran Avigny before news of his mysterious disappearance spreads?"
"Patience is a virtue," Lumian replied with a smile.
For a Hunter, this was an essential quality.
He stooped down and retrieved the makeup mirror from Moran Avigny's corpse's pocket.
At that moment, the makeup mirror snapped open.
It opened on its own!
Dark light surged from the palm-sized glass mirror, instantly filling the dimly lit quarry cave.
In the next instant, Lumian, Franca, and the others saw a figure quickly take shape beside the fixed entrance to the mirror world on the protruding rock.
It was a stunning woman with black hair and brown eyes. She wore a bright red dress with layers of embroidery and lace, revealing a large expanse of snow-white skin on her chest despite the cold winter. A friendly smile graced her face.
Perle?

The renowned courtesan in Trier, Perle, the theater actress from the Loen Kingdom?
Lumian was shocked and at a loss. He hadn't expected to encounter this flamboyant courtesan in such a setting.
Franca, Jenna, and Anthony also found the situation surreal and hard to believe.
Almost simultaneously, Lumian recalled two key facts related to Perle.
The first time he had observed Moran Avigny, Perle had been on a date with her new lover in the hotel's annex restaurant.
All courtesans were standard, textbook brokers—political brokers!
Combining these two points, a guess formed in Lumian's mind.
Could Perle also be a member of the School of Truth?
Could she be the Overseer that Jebus directly reported to, the bestowed of an evil god at the demigod level?
If that's the case, where did Madam Magician and the others end up? Who were they tracking?
Flee! We must flee immediately!
At that moment, Perle looked at Lumian and the others, a smile forming on her lips as she uttered the Words of Order.
"Your crimes remain unpunished!"

Chapter 729: Purpose

Franca had already concealed herself by the time she recognized Perle. Her plan was to circle around and use the mirror to reflect Perle's figure, hoping to curse her.

If the curse failed, it would at least create an opening for Jenna to sneak up from the shadows and assassinate the target.

Though not as cunning as Lumian the Conspirer, both Jenna and Franca instinctively sensed that the sudden assaulting Perle was incredibly dangerous, even more so than Moran Avigny. However, they didn't go so far as to suspect her of being an Overseer or demigod.

As Perle uttered the Words of Order, Franca felt slender, snake-like entities emerge from the surrounding shadows, enveloping her despite her invisibility.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Razor-sharp icicles burst from the ground like soldiers thrusting their spears.

Franca quickly leaped up, pressing one hand against an icicle to tumble out of the area.

She narrowly avoided impalement, hanging precariously from the icicle's tip.

Before Franca could regain her footing, black flames shot out from the shadows, hurtling directly towards her. The serpentine creatures around her constricted, binding her in layers.

Wh-- With no time to react, Franca could only watch helplessly as the black flames consumed her.

At the same moment, a figure stepped out from the shadows-- Clarice, wearing an elegant black court dress with her hair in a sophisticated bun. However, the Demoness of Black's face was blurry and dark, unlike a living person.

My crime is cheating, deceit, and exploiting others, mainly in reference to the Demoness Sect. Is this punishment from a manifestation of the Demoness of Black? Franca's thoughts raced.

Her body shattered like glass.

Mirror Substitution!

Jenna, while stealthily hidden, also encountered a strange foe.

It was a clergyman from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, dressed in a white robe adorned with golden threads. Not only were his facial features hazy and unrecognizable, but his physique was also constantly shifting in subtle ways.

A blaze of sunlight descended, banishing the shadows in the area and exposing Jenna's body.

Realization dawned on Jenna.

My crime is believing in multiple deities and betraying the Eternal

Blazing Sun...
So, an abstract embodiment of the Church's clergyman is punishing me...
Jenna quickly rolled to the other side of the quarry cave, dodging the clergyman's attack.
Anthony was not forgotten.
Just as he prepared to use Psychological Invisibility to approach Perle and send her into a Frenzy, a whip wreathed in silver lightning lashed out at him.
A crackling sound echoed in Anthony's mind, both illusory and real, sending a sharp pain through his soul. Every hair on his body stood on end.
If not for his incredible self-control, he would have screamed.
Before him stood a middle-aged man in a black uniform and white shirt, dressed as a Trier police officer.
My crime stems from my transgressions as an information broker, so I'm up against Trier's police? Most Trier police officers lack Beyonder powers, yet this Punisher directly wields abilities in the Arbiter domain? As Anthony conjured grayish-white dragon scales on his body, he deftly ran and rolled, seeking a chance to use Psychological Invisibility.
The already dim surroundings around Lumian suddenly darkened further, as if something was about to take shape, filling him with a profound sense of dread.
Just as the terrifying entity was about to emerge, it abruptly disintegrated. Even the surrounding gloom and fear dissipated like melting snow.
Uh... Is my crime too severe for a Punisher to manifest directly? Lumian guessed, considering Franca and the others' situations.
Behind him, spears of blazing white flame materialized and shot towards the flamboyantly dressed Perle like a volley of arrows.
The flaming spears formed a majestic and fierce forest, providing cover for Lumian's true attack.
He had already drawn his revolver, gently flicking the cylinder with his finger.
Three of the six bullets he had obtained from Jebus were loaded.
Lumian needed to use Implosion Bullets now.
Only by employing these special bullets in combination with his Cull ability did he have a sliver of hope of injuring Perle, whom he suspected to be the Overseer!
Bang!
Lumian's eyes blazed with an iron-black intensity as the starlight-shimmering bullets wove between the blazing white flame spears, speeding towards Perle's neck.

Perle stood beside the fixed entrance to the mirror world, her amiable smile unwavering.
The corners of her mouth curled up. "How dare you attack an Overseer?"
As the self-proclaimed Overseer uttered her first word, Lumian's starlight bullet abruptly changed course, hurtling towards his own neck.
Likewise, the blazing white flame spears strangely returned to Lumian's side, engulfing him.
Before Lumian could teleport, an Implosion Bullet struck him, causing his body to collapse bit by bit.
Crack!
He transformed into a mirror, shattering into countless fragments that vanished without a trace as they gathered uncontrollably.
After the battle with Jebus, Franca had provided Lumian with another Mirror Substitution!
Perle showed no surprise. She sighed and smiled. "Personally, I'd prefer you die now and release that Angel. It would greatly benefit our common cause. Unfortunately, the one who made the Under the Table transaction with me insisted on capturing you alive."
Lumian materialized in a corner of the quarry cave, catching Perle's words.
Instantly, numerous guesses flooded his mind.
Under the Table transaction?
Perle is the Overseer directly above Jebus. She evaded pursuit from the Major Arcana card holders by completing another high-level Under the Table transaction. And for this, she must capture me and take me somewhere?
When did she find out about Moran Avigny's situation? Was she monitoring his residence? Or did she receive information from other sources?
Surely the Purifiers are professional enough to keep the news under wraps, right?
Why capture me alive? Who wants me alive?
To use me as a sacrifice, like Susanna Mattise?
Or could the person engaging in Perle's Under the Table transaction be a Sufferer from the Sinners organization? Someone who doesn't want Termiboros to break free from the seal, but instead wants to control this Angel and use Him as an ingredient for advancement?
No, that's not right. If he were just a Sufferer, even if he could mislead Madam Magician and the others temporarily, he couldn't prevent them from returning to help. Yet, Perle remains calm and collected...
Could the other party in the Under the Table transaction be a

faction of the Mother Tree of Desire or the Great Mother? Only they could organize a lineup in this world to deal with the Major Arcana card holders...
With his keen Conspirer's intuition, Lumian connected two problems.
First, the counter-party of Overseer Perle's Under the Table transaction. Second, how she discovered Moran Avigny's mishap so quickly and promptly convened a high-level Under the Table transaction.
As these questions intertwined, a thought struck Lumian.
In the Purifier team, a key member of April Fool's wasn't a transmigrator. Together with Loki, he single-
handedly orchestrated the loss of the humanoid Sealed Artifact. To this day, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church hasn't discovered the perpetrator!
Could a Broker also be involved?
Indeed, only if a key April Fool's member lurking within the Church appears unrelated to the Purifier who lost the humanoid Sealed Artifact, and they don't even know each other, can the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, with its numerous Sealed Artifacts and demigods, investigate for so long without finding anything!
From the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's perspective, the Purifier who lost the humanoid Sealed Artifact truly committed a momentary "mistake." He had no motive for the crime and no links to April Fool's...
Has the School of Truth expanded the Broker business into the Eternal Blazing Sun Church?
It's true; only Unshadowed won't be embroiled in gray transactions, and most Purifiers can't reach Sequence 4. Similarly, not all Cardinals are from the Sun pathway...
It seems the School of Truth has long been connected to April Fool's and is collaborating...
Damn it, it really is a broker organization. It can be associated with any faction!
Could it be that the School of Truth's collaborator within the Eternal Blazing Sun Church urgently transmitted information about Moran Avigny's mishap to Overseer Perle?
Upon receiving the news, Perle immediately convened a high-level Under the Table transaction. Was the transaction with April Fool's?
No, April Fool's doesn't have that power. Could it be the Celestial Worthy backing them or other high-
ranking subordinates of the Celestial Worthy?
No wonder they want to capture me alive...
Perle might have intended to offer an item in exchange for

severing her connection with Moran Avigny. However, the counterparty in the Under the Table transaction proposed a new plan, allowing her to switch from passive to active, seizing the opportunity to deceive and set a trap. How far it can go depends on her improvisation...

If it is indeed April Fool's and the Celestial Worthy's will is faintly discernible, it would explain why Madam Magician didn't sense anything amiss and walked right into the trap.

Realizing this, Lumian was alarmed.

Termiboros warned me twice about the School of Truth. Could it be that He foresaw the corresponding fate unfold and a chance for Him to break free from the seal? Is that why He was so eager, hoping to compel it into fruition?

Chapter 730: Struggle

Lumian's mind raced, unable to fully process the myriad details, but in the heat of battle, he couldn't afford to waste a single moment overthinking. Only a Conspirer could deduce a possible scenario within two seconds of Mirror Substitution taking effect. Based on Perle's words, Franca and the others would have concluded that she was the Overseer directly above Jebus. She had sidestepped danger through the Under the Table transaction but now had no choice but to confront them head-on. They couldn't let their focus waver, not even for a second.

Lumian cursed inwardly, frustrated that the Blood Emperor's residual aura had been sealed by Underworld Daoist's death mark. If not for that, his best bet would have been to activate the mark on his right palm with everything he had, allowing Alista Tudor to "descend" upon Trier once again. It would have drawn the attention of Angels from the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, the God of Steam and Machinery Church, and other powerhouses hiding in the city, pressuring Perle to retreat.

Without a second thought, Lumian triggered the black mark on his right shoulder.

His plan was to teleport out of there and into Saint ViÃ¨ve Cathedral.

Since Perle's goal was to capture him alive, he obtained a conclusion through simple deduction.

She would undoubtedly chase after him with all her might. There's no way she would stay put and risk failing the Under the Table transaction!

If that happened, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony would still have to deal with the conjured Punisher, but at least they wouldn't be facing a demigod. Their odds of survival would be significantly better. For any Mid-Sequence Beyonder, even a single Sequence 4 demigod--bestowed or not--was enough to make their hearts sink with despair.

Moreover, the two Demonesses and Anthony all possessed Mirror Substitution, as well as items like the Seven-Stone Bracelet. As long as they didn't become a demigod's target, they had a real shot at using the substitutes to escape to the Church of The Fool's cathedral at Lavigny Docks.

As Lumian's form swiftly dissipated, he reached into his pocket with his left hand, his mind crystal clear, and grasped Mr. K's finger.

He couldn't be sure if Perle was telling the truth about capturing him alive or if it was a lie. Was it just a demigod's nonchalance

when dealing with a Mid-Sequence Beyonder, or a habit formed from a Broker's constant deception?
He had to be prepared for the possibility that Perle might not follow him and instead stay behind to take on Franca and the others.
His contingency plan was: Summon Mr. K!
While Mr. K, as a Shepherd, couldn't directly fight a demigod, he was the Aurora Order's Oracle. He could hear the True Creator's guidance at any time. His presence meant that the deity he believed in would surely cast His gaze upon them. There was a good chance it would trigger some miraculous turn of events in their favor.
And even without divine intervention, the Beyonder of the Apprentice pathway under Mr. K's Grazing appeared to have records of demigod abilities. It should be able to hold off Perle for a few seconds, giving Franca and the others a window to escape.
As Lumian activated his teleportation, Franca, who had been compelled to use Mirror Substitution, materialized in a corner of the quarry cave.
Clutching a makeup mirror, she decisively activated the Mirror Cufflink.
She already knew Perle was the Overseer and intended to escape via the mirror world.
Once concealed within the mirror world, she could jump to the mirrors on Jenna, Lumian, and Anthony. She could extend her hand and pull her companions into the mirror world, and they could all flee together!
The glass-like Mirror Cufflink emitted a dark light, but Franca didn't budge, unable to enter the makeup mirror in her grasp.
Wh-- Franca was stunned for a moment before a realization hit her.
Failing to enter the mirror world without any interference could only mean one thing:
This was a mirror world!
Except for certain unique mirror worlds, one couldn't enter the mirror world from within the mirror world itself. The only option was to use the mirror to jump!
Mirror worlds came in two varieties. The first was conventional and universal, not a true world. It was a concept of "doors" amalgamated into a dark void passageway linking all mirrors. Wherever mirrors and their surfaces existed, such mirror worlds with no discernible boundaries could be found. The second type was special mirror worlds. They relied on the conventional mirror world and leveraged specific corruption or corresponding abilities

to take shape. Some were permanent, others temporary. Their characteristics closely mirrored the real world, projections of one facet of reality, but each had its own unique limitations and rules.
The mirror world in Fourth Epoch Trier belonged to the latter category. It contained only a projection of Trier, a sprawling metropolis, and excluded other regions. Moreover, it was split into three distinct levels.
This mirror world was also special, but on a smaller scale. It was merely a projection of the quarry cave, likely generated by some ability.
As a veteran Shadow Merchant, Perle had a long-established partnership with the Mirror People. It was perfectly normal for her to trade items capable of creating temporary special mirror worlds!
Recalling the dark light emanating from Moran Avigny's mirror just before Perle's arrival, Franca's suspicion was confirmed.
Just as she was about to warn Lumian and the others, she saw the Demoness of Black's Punishment projection seize the moment to reflect herself in a mirror.
Franca's pupils dilated as she activated Mirror Substitution.
In an instant, she transformed into a mirror, engulfed by pitch-black flames from within.
Smack!
The mirror slammed into the ground, shattering into countless fragments.
At the same time, Lumian's figure rematerialized in place.
His teleportation had failed.
This was indeed a special mirror world. Finding an exit was the only way out.
Mr. K's finger had already expanded, morphing into a mass of flesh and blood that enveloped Lumian's body, forming a vibrant red cloak that covered him from head to toe.
With a sickening sound, Lumian's body was pierced by grotesque wounds, as if struck by invisible arrows.
It was only thanks to the protection of the flesh-and-blood cloak, transformed from Mr. K's finger, that he managed to survive. Otherwise, he would have been forced to animate his shadow to absorb those fatal injuries on his behalf.
Of course, he still had one more Mirror Substitution up his sleeve—courtesy of Jenna.
Overseer Perle stood firm beside the jutting rock deep within the quarry cave. She flashed Lumian a smile and said, "Those who defy supervision and try to flee shall face punishment."
As Franca and Lumian's attempts failed in quick succession, Jenna

tossed out a handful of fluorescent dust, whispered an incantation, and promptly vanished from the Punisher dressed as a clergyman of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.
A golden light surged around the Punisher, clad in a white robe adorned with golden threads, spreading outward in layers.
As the golden light reached an empty space, it abruptly encountered an obstacle, staining it a faint golden hue.
Jenna felt a surge of warmth and courage, but her eyes reflected a pure and magnificent blazing pillar of light.
Crack!
The pillar of light struck her, transforming her into a mirror and shattering her into pieces.
Anthony seized the chance to activate Psychological Invisibility once more. However, the Trier police incarnation didn't overlook him, as if it could detect the scent of sin on him.
Two bolts of lightning shot forth from the Punisher's eyes, piercing Anthony's soul.
Anthony's eyes bulged, his mouth agape, but he couldn't even muster a scream. He stood paralyzed, rooted to the spot.
"Death!" Trier's police incarnation uttered a single ancient Hermes word.
Clenching his right hand into a fist, he lunged at Anthony, leaving an afterimage in his wake.
Bang!
Imbued with a peculiar force, the fist collided with Anthony's head in an inescapable blow.
Crack! Anthony shattered into countless glimmering mirror fragments.
Franca, dressed in an assassin suit, reappeared.
Confronted by a demigod's overwhelming power, the ethereal, non-godhood-possessing Demoness of Black, and the sealed special mirror world, she decisively retrieved an item from her Traveler's Bag.
It was a silver-white full-body armor, taller than Franca herself.
Pride Armor!
Franca positioned the Pride Armor in front of her, its back facing Overseer Perle.
She was convinced that the demigod was the crux of the problem, not the Punisher taking the form of the Demoness of Black. If Perle remained unscathed, another Punisher would emerge to eliminate even after dispatching the first. She might even face a direct "accusation."
Franca noticed Perle standing beside a protruding rock with a fixed entrance to the mirror world.

It led her to believe that Perle could harness the Fourth Epoch Trier's abundant corruption to request a fixed entrance to the mirror world created by the Primordial Demoness. Not only would it allow them to enter and exit the conventional mirror world without relying on their inherent characteristics and abilities, but it would also serve as the gateway to this special mirror world.
After all, it could be considered a gift from a true god!
The instant the Pride Armor's feet touched the ground, it suddenly spun around, fixing an invisible gaze upon Overseer Perle.
Franca swiftly leaped to the side and rolled, avoiding facing the Pride Armor's back.
Thud thud thud!
The silver-white full-body armor charged towards Overseer Perle, condensing a broadsword of light in its hand.
...
In the dark cathedral bereft of a deity's Sacred Emblem, a pea rapidly grew, transforming into a multitude of thick turquoise vines that converted the area into a lush paradise of plants and an otherworldly forest.
They separated the suspended corpses, preventing them from approaching The Hermit.
Judgment, who had remained silent, extended her right palm, her eyes glowing with a copper-gold luster.
She spoke gravely in ancient Hermes, "Marionettes are prohibited here!"
The animated corpses abruptly ceased their movements, and Magician tore open the void before her, tainting it with resplendent starlight, forming an enchanting door.
Beyond the door was the portrait of a woman—Loki, who had undergone a bizarre transformation.
Loki reached into the air and pulled out a figure.
The figure was a woman with a voluptuous build, dressed in a black gown. A golden crown encrusted with jewels adorned her head. She had curly chestnut hair, blue eyes, a high nose bridge, and slightly thin lips. She exuded a Demoness-like allure from the inside out.

Chapter 731: Another Good Job

In the depths of the shadowy cathedral, Loki conjured a figure out of thin air. The scene unfolding beside him was vividly reflected in the eyes of the Major Arcana card holders: Magician, Judgment, and Hermit.

On the wall of aqueous-black stone bricks, a painting depicted a woman in a bright red dress adorned with intricate embroidery and lace. Her black hair was styled in an elegant high bun, and her face bore a mysterious, frozen smile. Her brown eyes seemed transfixed on the vivid, illusory ball of yarn before the Hermit and the peculiar golden lamp connected to its other end.

The woman remained within the mural, silently observing the scene.

At the same time, the mature lady with a golden crown, exuding the allure of a Demoness, was pulled from the air by Loki. She turned her piercing blue eyes towards the Hermit, who had just entered the cathedral's depths through the starlight door.

As her long, chestnut hair billowed, each strand thickening, she too seemed fixated on the Hermit.

Prophesying a grim future, the Hermit quickly shielded herself with the Magic Wishing Lamp.

Then, arching her back slightly, she sprouted pure white, illusory feathers reminiscent of a swan's.

Fairytale magic, Ugly Duckling!

Even an ugly duckling could transform into a swan!

This power allowed Saints who had not yet reached the Angel level to reveal their incomplete Mythical Creature forms.

The pristine swan feathers abruptly turned a grayish-white and hardened into falling rocks. The Hermit's exposed skin split open, revealing grotesque, sinister crevices.

Within the crevices, flesh and blood writhed, giving rise to black and white eyeballs.

The eyeballs petrified and fell away, only to be replaced by new ones. Yet, the Magic Wishing Lamp before the Hermit remained untouched.

The black-clad empress's body suddenly became ethereal, her form dissipating into a torrent of knowledge that surged towards Magician, dressed in white with golden embroidery.

Magician appeared beside Loki in an instant, but a deluge of information immediately emerged from the void behind her.

Vanishing, the Magician reappeared "simultaneously" in nine different locations throughout the cathedral, her form flickering incessantly.

Upon realizing that their target was the woman in the wall painting, she attempted to escape the shadowy cathedral by force, but each effort led her back to where she began.
The black-clad empress's incarnation continued to pour forth information from behind the Magician's nine figures, seeking to infiltrate the target's mind and denying her the time to tear through the void.
Smiling, Loki rose from the black wooden armchair and reached into the void with his right hand, as if grasping someone's arm once more.
Seizing the moment, Judgment reached the cathedral's dome and pressed down with her right palm, like chaos descending from the heavens to the earth.
In ancient Hermes, she solemnly declared, "Mystery weakens here, while reality grows stronger!"
...
As the silver Pride Armor raced towards Overseer Perle, Franca activated the Seven-Stone Bracelet on her left wrist.
The crimson, blood-like gem on the bracelet, adorned with three diamonds and four uniquely colored gems, burned with a fierce light.
In a flash, Franca appeared behind the Demoness of Black.
She refrained from joining the Pride Armor in confronting Overseer Perle, having learned from Lumian's encounter that their attacks would have no effect on the Overseer and only invite proportional punishment.
Instead, she resolved to eliminate the Demoness of Black, a Punisher lacking godhood and exhibiting rigidity. The Demoness was merely equivalent to a stronger Sequence 5 Beyonder, making it possible for Franca to deal with her.
As for Overseer Perle, the outcome depended on the changes and effects brought about by the Pride Armor, a Sealed Artifact devoid of "sin" and pragmatic intelligence.
Materializing, Franca raised her left hand, already adorned with the Ring of Punishment.
In her lake-blue eyes, two bolts of lightning suddenly ignited and shot forth.
Crack!
The Demoness of Black's figure shattered into countless fragments.
Dammit! Mirror Substitution is such a nuisance! Franca couldn't help but curse inwardly.
At that instant, Lumian had just endured the punishment for attempting to escape, the flesh cloak transformed from Mr. K's finger shattering and splattering on the ground.

He watched as the silver-white Pride Armor rushed to Overseer Perle's side, raising a broadsword forged from pure light.
Perle maintained her friendly smile, undaunted by the imposing presence of the massive, heavy armor.
An Overseer was impervious to attacks from those lacking godhood!
This was the sacred significance of overseeing.
As for daring to strike an Overseer lifeform, the consequences would be dire!
Perle could already envision the armor-like Sealed Artifact turning on the Demoness who had summoned it in the next moment.
As the Overseer contemplated this, the silver-white Pride Armor swung the Sword of Dawn in its grasp.
It remained unaffected!
Perle's pupils dilated as her figure in the bright red dress transformed into a pitch-black shadow.
The broadsword of light descended, cleaving the shadow in two.
The divided shadows took form, replicating multiple similar shadows that scattered in all directions.
The Pride Armor genuflected and drove the Sword of Dawn into the ground.
The broadsword shattered, unleashing countless sharp fragments of light that swept across the area.
The entire quarry cave was bathed in illumination. To Franca's surprise, the Demoness of Black, whose outline had been visible nearby, rapidly faded and vanished.
Likewise, Jenna and Anthony, who had been cornered by the clergyman of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church and the Trier police incarnations, found themselves no longer under attack or pursuit.
Bewildered, they observed as the Punishers, who had exerted immense pressure upon them, melted away like frost under the sun's rays.
Lumian was astonished by the Pride Armor's performance.
He had harbored little faith in the Sealed Artifact's ability to challenge Overseer Perle. Yet, to his pleasant surprise, it had exceeded his expectations!
Furthermore, he had noticed several peculiar details since Perle's arrival.
The Overseer's feet had not shifted an inch!
She stood beside a protruding rock with a fixed entrance to the mirror world, never pursuing or approaching. Instead, she exerted her influence upon them from a distance.
Could this be an inherent trait of an Overseer? Might the Pride Armor's capacity to strike her stem from the abhorrence and

hatred imbued within it by a deity before His demise? Were only attacks infused with godhood or a corresponding level of corruption capable of harming an Overseer? Lumian frowned, pondering these possibilities.
Snapping out of her daze, Franca shouted to him, "Moran Avigny's makeup mirror!"
She knew that the Pride Armor could not so easily vanquish Overseer Perle. They had to seize this fleeting, uninterrupted window to escape the extraordinary mirror world.
Before Overseer Perle's appearance, the dark light emanating from Moran Avigny's makeup mirror had led Franca to suspect it might be the exit!
Franca trusted that Lumian grasped the full import of her concise words and refrained from elaborating further. The blue gem on her Seven-Stone Bracelet emitted a sea-like glow.
In an instant, she materialized beside Jenna, grasping her arm.
A diamond on the Seven-Stone Bracelet illuminated.
Teleport!
Franca and Jenna teleported to Moran Avigny's corpse and the nearby makeup mirror.
Meanwhile, Lumian readily understood Franca's message.
He activated the black mark on his right shoulder and teleported to Anthony's side. Without hesitation, he grabbed his teammate's arm and teleported once more.
Their destination: Moran Avigny's already open makeup mirror!
However, upon appearing near Moran Avigny's corpse, Franca and Lumian were stunned to discover that the makeup mirror had become illusory and unreal, as if it were a mere projection of the original item.
At that moment, they heard Overseer Perle's voice once again.
"You stand guilty! You have harmed an Overseer!"
As her voice echoed, the silver-white full-body armor ascended, and the void behind it ruptured into darkness.
Propelled by an unseen force, the Pride Armor plummeted into a centipede-like crack resembling a void scar, falling into a pitch-black abyss that extended as far as the eye could see. It vanished entirely from Lumian and his companions' sight.
Judgment: Exile!
Fragmented shadows swiftly converged beside the protruding rock with the fixed entrance to the mirror world. Overseer Perle, garbed in her red dress, reappeared.
Holding a makeup mirror in her hand, she smiled and said, "Did you believe I would leave the exit intact? I replaced it with a counterfeit long ago!"

Lumian, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony's expressions shifted slightly.
As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian, already grasping Anthony's arm, swiftly activated the black mark on his right shoulder.
He and Anthony vanished in an instant beside Moran Avigny's corpse.
Franca made a similar effort, causing the emerald in her Seven-Stone Bracelet to emit a transparent green light.
However, just as she Blinked with Jenna to a corner of the quarry cave, Perle's Words of Order resounded in her ears.
"You stand guilty! You attacked an Overseer!"
Franca was the one who had unleashed the Pride Armor!
As Franca prepared to use the Seven-Stone Bracelet to depart her current location, she suddenly witnessed the surrounding void freeze and transform into layers of amber, encasing her and Jenna within.
This was a "cage" from which even teleportation could not provide escape.
It encompassed the entire area, and even if Franca and Jenna attempted to employ Mirror Substitution, they would remain confined within its boundaries.
Judgment: Confinement!
Overseer Perle averted her gaze, searching for Lumian and Anthony.
She surveyed the surroundings but found no trace of the two.

Chapter 732: Protection and Trust

Perle swiftly focused and took her Overseer position, carefully observing the different sections of the quarry cave.

The area was shrouded in darkness, with only a carbide lamp lying on its side providing a faint bluish-yellow light.

As she looked around, Perle spotted Lumian and Anthony.

They were both located at the quarry cave's exit, which marked the isolated boundary of this unique mirror world. It wasn't a viable escape route, leaving them trapped.

Lumian stood facing Perle, wearing the Flog boxing gloves with iron-black spikes. He gripped a brass revolver in his hand.

Anthony took cover behind him, their backs almost touching.

The Hypnotist, however, wasn't standing. He was down on one knee, using a blank sketchbook propped on his right thigh as a surface to quickly draw something with a short pencil.

Bottle of Fiction!

Lumian and Anthony found themselves inside a Bottle of Fiction, formed from the quarry cave's exit.

But this was pointless against Perle, who had a complete overview of the current mirror world. She could easily see where Lumian and Anthony were hiding.

As she watched the scene unfold, Overseer Perle felt a strange, unsettling aura, as if it involved a gray domain.

Lumian, as the team's leader and most powerful member, appeared to be buying the Spectator more time.

Whether he was gambling on her unwillingness to kill him, hoping to capture him alive, so he could be used as a shield, it was evident that the Spectator's actions were critical. Lumian believed it could either harm her—an Overseer—or help them evade an Overseer!

Without hesitation, Perle fixed her gaze on Lumian and Anthony within the Bottle of Fiction and declared in the Words of Order, "An Overseer sees all secrets!"

The moment she uttered those words, the Bottle of Fiction at the quarry cave's exit quietly disintegrated.

However, Perle noticed that while Lumian was no longer shielded by the Bottle of Fiction, Anthony still remained inside one. The Overseer's words had failed to dispel it!

Confirming this detail, Lumian smiled.

The Bottle of Fiction surrounding Anthony was created using him as a base.

His spread legs and the ground created a symbolic doorway.

Lumian's body arched slightly as he faced Overseer Perle. His smile

twisted as he muttered under his breath, "Yes, Anthony is carrying out a crucial task under my guidance.
"But to break the Bottle of Fiction made from a living person like me, you must defeat me first. Anyone trying to harm Anthony will have to go through me!
"I am now Anthony's shield. I am the wall that protects him!"
Perle's smile diminished slightly as she regarded Lumian with a grave expression.
"You stand guilty!
"You murdered someone!"
Murder... Lumian's heart skipped a beat.
He wasn't surprised by the fact that he had killed someone, but he didn't expect Overseer Perle to charge him with such a crime.
No matter the form of the ensuing punishment, the ultimate outcome was set in stone.
A murderer met his end!
Doesn't she want to take me alive? Lumian had voluntarily become Anthony's shield, believing that Perle wouldn't risk killing him. This would limit many of her abilities. He hoped to buy time until Anthony finished the sketch on the Beyonder painting album he had gotten from Bard. The album's purpose was to bring drawings to life or manifest special effects for a period.
Unexpectedly, this plan fell apart from the start.
Of course, Lumian didn't bet everything on the possibility of the Overseer only wishing to capture him alive. It was impossible for him yo defeat a demigod, but he had some hope at buying time.
A muffled thunderclap resounded in the low ceiling of the quarry cave. Silver-white lightning serpents sprang forth, intertwining into a tree of lightning as wide as a barrel, aimed at Lumian.
Before the thunder echoed and the lightning struck, Lumian had already lifted his hand, pointing the brass revolver at the world's punishment.
His blue eyes turned iron-black, but he couldn't perceive any weakness in the terrifying lightning.
His only option was to channel blazing white flames into the revolver and the bullet about to be fired.
Bang!
As the threatening silver-white tree of lightning hurtled down, a bullet glowing with dark green flames shot from the muzzle, colliding with the immense lightning bolt.
Weakening Bullet!
This was the Weakening Bullet he had obtained from Jebus!
Instantly, the barrel-thick lightning bolt shattered the dark-green bullet and the blazing white flames encasing it. A blinding silver-

white light engulfed Lumian.
Boom!
A horrifying roar assaulted Anthony's ears, causing his body to shudder involuntarily, nearly deafening him.
He remembered the night the cultists attacked the army camp. Gunfire, cannon blasts, screams, and shouts came from every direction, overwhelming him with panic and fear. It had left a profound psychological scar that took years to heal.
Now, he felt as if he had been transported back to that moment.
Anthony gathered himself and looked at the blank sketchbook before resuming his sketch. The pencil in his hand rustled as it moved.
He could still vividly recall Lumian's body language: "Unless I die and someone steps over my corpse, no one can harm you!"
Compared to the helplessness and terror of that night at the military camp, where everyone was in peril, Anthony felt the current situation wasn't as dire.
At the very least, I have a dependable companion!
At the very least, someone is willing to risk their life to protect me!
Amidst the innumerable silver lightning serpents, Lumian's body first fractured into mirror shards, then charred and crumbled into dust—the Mirror Substitution Jenna had provided him!
Lumian's figure reappeared, standing firm in his spot with his legs slightly parted.
Rumble. The thunder in the sky didn't fade with the previous punishment. A new round of execution was brewing.
Since the Overseer had prosecuted, the punishment would persist until the target was well and truly dead!
Lumian's scalp prickled, and his black hair stood on end from the lingering electricity in the air.
Seconds later, an even more magnificent and terrifying colossal lightning bolt silently descended.
Already clenching his teeth, Lumian tossed aside his revolver and raised his hands, allowing the Flog boxing gloves with iron-
black thorns to precisely meet the lightning's tip. Blazing white fireballs materialized above him.
The Flog boxing gloves could withstand an attack imbued with godhood at the cost of shattering or cracking!
Boom!
Amidst the abrupt, devastating explosion, the silver-white tree of death, composed of lightning, stopped at Lumian's fist and the Flog boxing gloves.
Rumble. Blazing white flames burst forth, driving the tiny lightning serpents back.

The lightning punishment quickly subsided, but the muffled rumble in the air lingered.
With multiple resounding cracks, Lumian's Flog boxing gloves turned charred and cracked, shattering into countless pieces that rained down.
Seeing a fresh round of lightning about to form, Lumian knew he shouldn't, but he couldn't resist urging Anthony inwardly, *Why isn't it done yet?* I can only hold on a little longer!
After a brief, suffocating silence, a silver-white giant lightning serpent abruptly struck from midair, illuminating the entire quarry cave and the smile on Overseer Perle's face.
Lumian only had time for one thing.
He animated his shadow and switched places with it.
Boom!
Amid the sharp and urgent thunderstorm, the giant lightning serpent consumed the shadow, instantly vaporizing it without a trace.
At last, this round of punishment concluded, and Lumian reappeared in front of Anthony. His legs were slightly apart, and his back was somewhat hunched, but no shadow remained under his feet.
Why isn't it finished yet? Lumian thought anxiously.
He considered dismantling the Bottle of Fiction and teleporting Anthony around.
However, he could tell that the Overseer's prosecuted punishment wouldn't end simply because he changed positions. With the speed of lightning, he couldn't depend on teleportation to evade it.
It wasn't a matter of teleportation being too slow, but rather the time he needed to activate the black mark on his right shoulder.
Rumbling thunder resonated in Lumian's ears, heralding the impending punishment.
Behind Lumian, sweat the size of soybeans formed on Anthony's forehead as he crouched on one knee, drawing on his right thigh, which served as a table.
The sketch's first half was successful and completed quickly, but for some reason, the final stroke suddenly became challenging.
The painting album influenced the pencil, causing it to greedily absorb Anthony's spirituality. However, even this substantial amount of spirituality could only inch the black lines forward slowly.
At the same time, the edges of the blank drawing page gradually curled, igniting with transparent flames, as if struggling to contain what Anthony was about to draw.
Anthony was well aware that this painting album was not meant

to display such a thing, but he had complete faith in Lumian's judgment and persevered.
Rumble!
The muffled thunder intensified, and Anthony, within the Bottle of Fiction, could hear it clearly.
Despite being a Psychiatrist, he found himself unable to control his emotions. Nervousness, impatience, anxiety, and panic surged within him.
He composed himself and continued the final stroke.
Seeing the terrifying silver lightning on the brink of taking shape and Anthony still silent behind him, Lumian felt a wave of despair.
Am I about to die?
Very well, I'd like to see what Termiboros looks like!
Death... Suddenly, a flash of inspiration illuminated Lumian's mind.
He retrieved an item from his Traveler's Bag.
It was a golden mask adorned with several dashes of oil paint.
He had obtained this golden mask from Hisoka, and it originated from Death!
Lumian swiftly put on the golden mask, his body rapidly growing cold as his aura gradually dissipated.
The terrifying lightning punishment brewing in midair abruptly came to a standstill.
Lumian gazed up at the silver-white electric serpents that no longer converged, his lips curling beneath the golden mask.
He had become an undead creature!
One of the golden mask's purposes was to transform the wearer into an undead being while preserving their intelligence!
Since Lumian was now "dead," the punishment had fulfilled its purpose. It naturally came to an end!
Witnessing this, the Overseer was momentarily taken aback before grasping the situation.
She chuckled, but her composure remained intact.
While the punishments descended, she had not sat idle and had prepared for any unforeseen circumstances.
She used a coin bag to execute an Under the Table transaction.
Her right hand was about to withdraw.
Behind Lumian, Anthony watched as the curled-up edge and invisible flames rapidly spread to the center of the painting page, intensifying his despair.
Even if he managed to complete the final stroke, the drawing paper would be rendered useless—nothing effective would come out of it.

Anthony gritted his teeth, choosing to trust his companion and Lumian.
He recalled Lumian's instructions: "Draw Monette first before drawing Madam Magician!"
Monette, the Islander swindler Monette... The instant this thought crossed Anthony's mind, he was astonished to see the painting paper's edge halt and the invisible flames temporarily freeze.
His pencil movements became smoother.
Mustering his spirituality, he finished drawing a monocle outlined by simple lines on the right eye of the thin-faced Islander with sunken eyes, thick lips, and slightly curly black hair.

Chapter 733: Praise You

Finishing the last stroke, Anthony sighed in relief, confirming he still lived.

Though unsure if Amon's incarnation--Monette's drawn form--could help turn the tables and find a way out of the mirror world, he had obeyed his partner's orders and done his part.

Almost at once, Anthony saw the corners of Monette's sketched mouth turn up, eyes appearing to come to life.

But the curling paper and translucent flames stirred once more.

In an instant, the drawing of Monette condensed into a ball, devoured by clear flames and absorbed into the dim Bottle of Fiction.

Wh-- Had it failed? Anthony's heart squeezed tight again.

Even a disciplined Hypnotist found it hard to stay calm in the face of this.

Right then, Overseer Perle, still next to the jutting rock, pulled her right hand from the Under the Table bag of coins.

The transaction was made; Lumian's group would teeter on the edge of sleep!

Perle looked back at her target. Lumian stood firm, wearing a gold mask painted black and white. His aura was gone, body radiating an icy breath of death.

But Lumian's now blue eyes stayed open.

As an Overseer, Perle knew something was wrong.

About to act, a thick darkness swallowed her, snuffing out the carbide lamp.

Perle's eyes shut as she swayed unsteadily.

She fell asleep.

Somehow, the sleep effect meant for Lumian's team had hit her instead, leaving them untouched.

Seeing this, Lumian felt shock, then immense joy.

He sensed a strange power pulsing from the Bottle of Fiction he had made with his body.

Did it work?

Had Anthony done it?

As expected, the entity's prior actions sought to help His father.

And His father is on our side against heretics!

Lumian quickly deactivated the Bottle of Fiction, ready to teleport to the sleeping Perle. He would get Moran Avigny's mirror and try to escape through the mirror world's set entrance.

If he could just get out, he could find help to make Perle leave.

Just then, Perle's coin bag and Moran Avigny's mirror fell to the ground.

Smack!
Moran Avigny's mirror broke, cracking the entire mirror world barrier. Perle, driven by flaming ambition, woke up with a start.
As Lumian's hopes sank, a shadow raced out of the shattered mirror.
It combined with strewn bits of flesh and blood, instantly reforming into Mr. K in his black robe.
When the mirror world took damage, the Aurora Order Oracle felt his finger and teleported on instinct, turning to shadow to slip through the cracks.
...
In the dark cathedral in an unknown location, Magician Blinked over and over, unable to shake off the flood of random information.
As she Blinked, starlight filled her eyes, solidifying into a weird, ancient stone wall clock.
Clang!
Grand, majestic chimes echoed in every nook of the cathedral.
An old, mottled phantom appeared in the air--a stone wall clock split into twelve sections, each crossing grayish-white or bluish-black symbols.
Clang!
The chimes carried an unspeakable, invisible torrent through long ages past, freezing all present.
The horrifying torrent of information froze. Hermit, changed into an incomplete Mythical Creature, stopped cold. Judgment, floating over the cathedral, turned to a statue.
Loki's hand, reaching into the void, also paused, failing to pull out a silhouette.
In this frozen state, the starlight in Magician's eyes changed again.
Countless complex mercury symbols appeared, quickly joining into a huge, unreal, scaleless serpent.
The silver-white giant snake, layered with dense patterns and symbols, made connected cylinders with different markings.
The next second, the mercury serpent bent to bite its tail before it began slowly turning.
The massive torrent of information started to reverse, going back the way it came until it turned back into the woman in the black dress with the gold crown.
The black-dressed woman faded, becoming a ghost and a floating, oddly captivating tarot card. In the end, both went back to the void and disappeared.
Fallen rocks flew back to Hermit's body, turning back to eyes or pure white. Hermit quickly lost her terrifying look that would

make anyone go mad.
Judgment returned to the surface, going back past the "door" as the mystery-weakening limit faded.
Loki drew back his hand, settling into the pitch-black wooden chair.
...
In the fractured special mirror world, Overseer Perle saw the hooded, black-robed Mr. K and his many sins upon waking up.
Oddly, the criminal who had done worse things than Lumian only had a small gray spot.
This suggested that finishing an Under the Table transaction with Mr. K would be hard, as if it needed certain conditions.
It seems to come from extreme devotion. All Under the Table transactions can only keep going with the permission of the one he has faith in... As Perle's mind raced, she glared at Mr. K and said with the Words of Order, "You stand guilty! You murdered someone!"
The space over Mr. K went dark at once as something awful took shape.
Having heard Lumian talk about Jebus's powers, he knew a deadly punishment was coming. He quickly changed his Grazing target, using Devil Transformation and Rose Bishop's flesh and blood magic to endure the unknown attack.
But in a flash, the growing penalties vanished, as if going to an unknown place.
The scary pressure, like thick smoke, blew away in fierce winds.
Mr. K was stunned for a moment before exploding in crazed laughter.
"Haha! Hahaha!
"I'm guilty, but the Lord carries my sins!"
"I'm innocent. I'm innocent to this world!"
Amid the laughter, Mr. K changed Grazing targets. Layers of unreal doors showed up in his eyes.
Many doors to different places came together, turning into ghostly books.
The book materialized in front of Mr. K, pages flipping fast.
"I came, I saw, I recorded."
As the ethereal voice rang out, the illusory book stopped on a page.
In an instant, Mr. K turned into a two- to three-meter-tall half-giant in cold black armor, holding a pitch-black sword.
He sprinted towards the Overseer.
"Praise you!" Mr. K roared, slicing down with the Sword of Darkness.
Perle's face went grim, seeing the prosecution had no effect on Mr.

K.
Of course, as a demigod, though caught off guard, she knew what to do.
Amid Mr. K's wild laughter, she stressed with the Words of Order, "An Overseer is protected!"
The black-armored half-giant used all his might, slashing at Perle's head with the dark broadsword, but an unseen barrier blocked it.
The barrier cracked. Mr. K's body quietly fell apart. A clean cut took off his right arm and shoulder, dropping them to the ground.
Though Mr. K used recorded demigod powers and had a bit of godhood, he still faced punishment for attacking a "clearly" protected Overseer.
This was a freshly done crime, not yet borne!
The flesh on Mr. K's shoulder writhed, as if a new arm would grow. But he ignored it. His left hand grabbed the falling dark sword, yelling again, "Praise you for creating everything!"
As the rough voice echoed, the dark broadsword slashed at Overseer Perle.
With Perle's former protection, the dropped coin bag floated back to her hand.
She quickly made an Under the Table deal aimed at everyone there.
Crack!
As the dark broadsword swung, the unseen barrier guarding the Overseer fully shattered.
Mr. K's left arm came off his body, showing a huge cut.
In the cut, blood-colored flesh tendrils grew fast, as if alive, as if a new Mr. K would emerge.
Overseer Perle wasn't happy. Based on the Under the Table deal, Mr. K, Lumian, and the rest should have gotten much weaker.
But in truth, nothing changed!
Could it be that I'm unlucky? The person who made the deal was a fraud who never meant to keep their end? Perle's heart sank as she couldn't move for some reason.
Then she saw the armless Mr. K bow in an exaggerated way.
The Aurora Order Oracle's mouth opened as wide as it could, corners going to his ears. Blood churned where it tore, flesh tendrils thickly covering the spot.
Using his stretched mouth, the black-armored Mr. K bit the dark sword's handle.
He jumped high, voice ringing from his chest.
"Praise you for bearing the world's sins!"
Amid hoarse yells, Mr. K fell, a straight dark sword using himself

as the grip, slashing at Overseer Perle.

Chapter 734: My Weapon

Lumian stood at the quarry cave's exit, wanting to work with Mr. K to take on Perle, but unsure of how to proceed.

Past experience had shown him that without godhood, any action against an Overseer would only come back to haunt him, without affecting the demigod at all.

With his golden mask removed, Lumian could only remain in place, considering what items he possessed that might be useful and effective. He was left with no option but to watch the fight between Mr. K and Perle unfold as a mere spectator.

At the same time, he scanned the area, looking for a way to utterly destroy the existing mirror world.

Anthony kept his posture and continued drawing on the blank painting album, which was missing a page.

His current subject was to be Madam Magician.

As he observed Mr. K's movements and listened to each slash, Lumian sensed a slight corruption creeping into his mind.

It surprised him that Mr. K could hold the Overseer at bay to some degree, unafraid of her accusations and armed with a means to harm her.

Lumian silently hoped that even if Mr. K couldn't defeat Perle, he would at least be able to drive her off.

Mustering strength from his waist and core, Mr. K swung his upper body as he descended, bringing the dark broadsword down on Overseer Perle's head for the third time.

Perle remained motionless, not using any Mirror Traversal-like ability to evade, nor rolling to the side. She stood firm beside the jutting rock, her body turning pitch-black and dissolving into a constantly dissipating shadow.

The dark, enigmatic broadsword plunged down abruptly, silently cleaving the shadows in two.

The shadows rapidly encircled the protruding rock, perpetually moving and merging once again. They writhed, striving to reassemble Overseer Perle's form.

Where the Sword of Darkness had cut through, the shadows struggled to form proper connections, barely managing to stack together into a humanoid shape riddled with cracks and misaligned parts.

Mr. K sprang up, ready to swing the dark broadsword gripped in the gaping crack of his mouth.

Suddenly, his body shrank rapidly, the cold black armor encasing him vanishing.

He reverted to his original form, dressed in a black hood and

matching robe.
The precariously assembled shadow gradually shed its black color, revealing human skin and a vivid red dress inch by inch.
...
In the shadowy cathedral at an undisclosed location, the mercury giant serpent phantom hanging in midair slowly faded away.
The Reboot was finished.
Perched on a black wooden armchair, Loki abruptly thinned and shrank, transforming into a paper figurine.
The paper figurine and chair then crumbled, disintegrating into dust.
Loki materialized in a far corner of the cathedral. Magician, appearing to still be airborne, quickly conjured an alternate self behind him.
As Loki reached into the void to pull out an assistant, his jet-black eyes suddenly shifted to blue.
The blue rapidly stained black, then reverted to blue, the two colors continually alternating.
Loki was paralyzed, unable to summon an aide, allowing Magician to stretch out her right hand and grasp with all her might.
The dark void warped, swallowing Loki. Then, the two shattered into fragments, ultimately buried in a bottomless abyss.
Throughout this, Loki's body instantly became ethereal, unreal, as if he were a projection or puppet that had been swapped at some moment.
Hermit, Judgment, and Magician simultaneously heard a regretful sigh and witnessed the shadowy cathedral itself turn ethereal and slowly disintegrate.
It, too, seemed to be a projection.
An aged, ethereal voice then echoed from the distance.
"My wish is for all the demigods present to be lost for three minutes."
The shadowy cathedral fully collapsed, and darkness engulfed the surroundings, devoid of starlight or boundaries.
...
In the special mirror world, realizing Mr. K could no longer maintain his godhood-enhanced half-giant state and Overseer Perle was close to returning to her human form, Lumian's first instinct was to shape-shift into a shadow being and flee through the growing rift in the mirror world to find other allies.
However, he was unsure if Mr. K had employed any mystical items upon entry, and whether Shadow Transformation alone would allow passage through the mirror world's fissure.
As Lumian watched Overseer Perle's face gradually come into view,

her eyes and nostrils both vertically misaligned, a sudden realization struck him.
I, too, can wound an Overseer...
If Mr. K can do it, so can I!
My fate is intertwined with Termiboros. To a degree, we can be considered one. I've long known I possess a fake angelic level!
The powers and items I wield won't hold godhood and can't touch an Overseer, but I should be able to do it myself.
I will become my own weapon!
These thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as a slightly manic grin spread across his face. His blood seemed to boil, as if set aflame.
In a flash, he disappeared and reappeared before Overseer Perle.
His eyes had already taken on an iron-black tint, revealing a few pale spots that marked Perle's vulnerabilities.
One such spot was just below the left side of her face!
Before Perle's shadows could fully reconstruct the Overseer, a multitude of incandescent white flames burst forth from Lumian's body.
Like a rushing current, they poured out from Lumian's eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, skin, and pores, completely enveloping him, transforming him into a raging inferno.
Let's do this!
Let us burn as one!
Let us explode together!
Lumian, now one with the blazing white flames, swung his right fist at Perle's left cheek.
Perle's vertically-misaligned eyes betrayed a flicker of confusion before understanding dawned.
But it was too late for her to protest or react. She had not even fully returned.
Bang!
Lumian's right fist collided with Perle's left cheek, caving it in.
As he struck, a ghastly wound appeared on his own chest and abdomen, but it was quickly consumed by the blazing white flames.
Perle felt the pain, but it was not a mortal blow.
At that instant, Lumian's face, wreathed in blazing white flames, displayed a sinister and frenzied smile.
It actually works!
I can truly use myself as a weapon to strike an Overseer!
Boom!
He detonated his right arm, using the incandescent white flames he had pre-injected to make it explode.

His right fist, propelled by a fierce, blazing white wave of flames, pierced Perle's left cheek and penetrated her skull.
Cull!
Crack! The special mirror world, with its dark barrier and numerous cracks, let out a shattering sound. It rapidly disintegrated and fell apart.
Lumian's head took an invisible blow, his skull caving in and teeth falling out.
Deprived of his right arm, he was hurled through the air, his entire body wreathed in blazing white flames.
His face twisted in agony, yet his eyes shone with elation.
Success!
He beheld a horrific, blood-red wound on the left side of Overseer Perle's face. Within the wound, a pale-white fog intermingled with the grayish-white brain. The shattered fist had ripped it asunder and set it ablaze.
As the blazing white flames faded, Overseer Perle's remaining right eye dulled, and her body slowly crumpled.
The cage imprisoning Franca and Jenna quickly disintegrated.
Mr. K, observing this, nodded approvingly.
Lumian is like me!
The fighting style is quite alike!
The only shortcoming is that he did not loudly praise the Lord during the final blow.
At the same time, Lumian's head buzzed, and he nearly blacked out. He collapsed to the ground, on the verge of losing consciousness.
He managed to stay awake only because he had undergone significant digestion of the Reaper potion. It felt as if he had completed another massive cull by the ancient tomb during the Dream Festival.
Wh— Lumian was initially thrilled, but then he forced himself to stand, shocked and suspicious.
He knew the digestion must have resulted from his Culling of Overseer Perle, but shouldn't a demigod suffice for him to fully digest the Reaper potion?
Lumian extinguished the incandescent white flames burning within and without. With his left hand, he retrieved the healing agent and Lie earring obtained from Jebus from his Traveler's Bag, all while examining Overseer Perle's corpse.
Just then, the special mirror world completely collapsed, and they found themselves back in reality, inside the quarry cave with a fixed mirror world entrance.
Next to the protruding rock where Perle had stood, there was no

corpse or white fog to be seen.
Lumian spotted an oil painting hanging on the corresponding rock wall.
The painting looked torn and ruined, but one could faintly discern that it had once portrayed a woman in a red dress.
Perle?
We weren't facing the true Overseer, but a painted figure she created using a Pixie pathway item?
This oil painting grants the depicted demigod a short lifespan, but no freedom of movement?
Is that why Perle never budged and always took the attacks head-on?
Amid his bewilderment, Lumian drank the healing agent Jebus had procured from the Great Mother's followers to ensure he would survive past 6 a.m.
At that moment, Perle's smiling voice resonated from the depths of the shattered oil painting.
"I didn't anticipate my painting person failing.
"But no matter. What's important is that the vortex is about to manifest. It won't be long before you're officially consumed.
"Everyone will be caught up in it..."
Perle's voice gradually faded into the depths of the oil painting, thwarting Mr. K's attempt to track her through teleportation.

Chapter 735: I Have Sinned

The healing agent's effects and the incineration of the original flames had largely stemmed the bleeding from Lumian's wounds. Flesh and blood had even started to regrow and form scabs over his skin.

Putting on the Lie earring, Lumian tried to shift the gruesome hole in his chest and abdomen to a less vital location. As he did so, he stared intently at the oil painting hanging on the rocky wall, his thoughts racing.

As an Overseer, Perle is unlikely to directly engage in combat herself?

Has her true form been lurking in the shadows this whole time to avoid any potential mishaps?

But if she had personally intervened, perhaps we would have been defeated long ago, with no chance for any slip-ups...

Furthermore, Perle doesn't appear overly concerned about capturing me alive. Doesn't the failure of her painting version indicate that the Under the Table deal she initiated didn't meet the requirements? She's bound to face severe consequences for that in the future.

It's not as if she's a fraud...

Coming to this realization, Lumian suddenly came up with a guess:

Perle was the sole person to mention capturing me alive. There's no other evidence to support it...

While this may indeed be a request from the other party in the Under the Table transaction, it's probably not the only one. It's likely one of multiple requests and the least critical. That's why, after creating the special mirror world, Perle immediately left this painting behind, allowing her painting version to handle us while she went off elsewhere.

Was she going to carry out the most vital and important requirement?

I can't fully trust a Broker's words either...

Based on her tone, she seems to have succeeded. This strongly suggests she's confident the vortex is on the brink of taking shape. It won't be long before it entraps everyone...

Apparently, she wasn't in the vicinity at all. She merely used the link to her painting self to briefly speak remotely before vanishing completely. We have no way to track her.

Lumian felt his theory could account for Perle's actions and certain details from the prior battle. This realization made his heart sink.

If his suspicions were correct, the School of Truth's vortex hadn't

been successfully halted and was about to manifest!
What would transpire after some time had passed?
Right then, Mr. K approached Lumian, his gaze locked on the tattered oil painting.
In a hoarse voice, he spoke, "I have sinned. I failed to discover the School of Truth's scheme beforehand, letting the issue escalate until it was on the verge of erupting."
As he talked, the flesh on Mr. K's shoulders writhed, and two pale, slender, damp arms gradually grew out. The black robe, its sleeves severed, was beyond repair.
Not waiting for Lumian to respond, Mr. K turned his head and said, "The disturbance here will soon be noticed. We shouldn't stay. Meet me tomorrow morning."
"Got it." Lumian glanced at his companions, who had concealed themselves in the shadows or used Psychological Invisibility, and nodded subtly.
He also intended to head to the safe house as quickly as possible to avoid any accidental attacks by official Beyonders.
Once Mr. K teleported away, Franca, Jenna, and Anthony came out of hiding.
"We should get back to the safe house now," Lumian said decisively.
Franca nodded and said with regret and sorrow, "I wonder where Pride Armor was sent. It would be such a shame if we truly lost it."
If Pride Armor hadn't hit Overseer Perle's painted self, compelling her to alter her life form and indirectly making the transformed Punishers disappear, even if Lumian could have still found a way to lure out the Islander swindler, Monette, they wouldn't have survived the following stages. In that case, he would face not only Perle's punishment but also Anthony's Punisher.
For Lumian and the others, Pride Armor had performed exceptionally; it was a Sealed Artifact of tremendous value. Nobody wanted it to be lost.
"If it were human and smart, it could find its way back. But now..." Lumian sighed, grasping Anthony's shoulder with his left hand.
Suddenly, dazzling starlight emerged from the void, rapidly forming a dreamlike door.
The door opened, and out came Magician, Judgment, and Hermit.
Surveying the scene, Magician noticed Lumian's dire condition, one arm missing. With an odd expression, she asked, "You were attacked?"
As she spoke, the quarry cave, lit solely by the carbide lamp's glow, darkened, as if an unseen curtain had been pulled around it.
"Yes," Franca replied on behalf of Lumian, who had only gained

enough reprieve from his injuries to avoid imminent death. She concisely recounted the whole situation.
"The one who attacked you came from Perle's painted self. Her true form departed to do something else?" Magician sought confirmation.
"That appears to be the case," Lumian responded.
Magician exchanged glances with Judgment and Hermit, their eyes meeting without hiding their bewilderment.
After a short pause, Magician offered no explanation. Starlight gathered in her eyes, as if tracing a pattern.
A gentle rain fell, soaking Lumian's body and fully healing his wounds.
Nourished by the rain, Franca and the others felt their weariness melt away.
It closely resembles the power Madame Night used in the dream... Lumian drew a connection.
Magician nodded and instructed, "Provide me the details in writing tomorrow."
With that, she disappeared along with Judgment and Hermit.
As the darkness around them lifted, Lumian realized they had returned to the safe house in the administrative district, where Jenna had summoned Judgment's messenger.
"Madam Magician and the others are perplexed that we were attacked by Perle's painting self," Anthony remarked while putting away the blank painting collection, voicing his thoughts.
Lumian nodded and replied, "What's perplexing shouldn't be Perle attacking us. It's not unusual for an Overseer with an Under the Table transaction at the heart of it all to do something like that."
"So what were they perplexed about?" Jenna and Franca couldn't figure out an answer.
Anthony tried to analyze the situation.
"They're not perplexed by Perle's attack itself, but why we were targeted by her painted self specifically.
"They seem to think we wouldn't be attacked by Perle directly. Whether she had such intentions or acted on them is irrelevant."
Lumian and the others became lost in thought.
Abruptly, Franca exclaimed.
Looking at Lumian and the others, she slowly withdrew her hand from her Traveler's Bag in astonishment.
"Pride Armor is in here. It's returned!"
"Did Madam Magician help locate it?" As this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he noticed Franca's actions.
He instantly shouted, "Stop!"
He couldn't allow Franca to retrieve the Pride Armor!

This is a confined room, and I'm present!
Franca's expression froze, and she immediately stopped moving her elbow.
...
In the mirror world created by dark void tunnels, Overseer Perle continuously moved from mirror to mirror, searching for her final destination.
Her expression stayed calm, thrilled that the calamity had instead accelerated the vortex's formation.
On the other side of the dark, vacant tunnel, a vibrant ball of yarn quietly trailed her, leaving a concealed path.
...
The next morning, having sent the letter to Magician, Lumian reached Psychic's headquarters and met Mr. K in the basement.
Both their limbs had been restored.
Clad in an enormous hood and black robe, Mr. K disregarded this. In a grating voice, he told Lumian, "Come with me somewhere."
"For what purpose?" Lumian's demeanor toward Mr. K had become more at ease after their collaboration the previous night.
Mr. K nodded and explained, "First, I wish to atone for this incident. Second, through the idol, I want to notify the Lord that you've grown and can serve as His envoy. He will make preparations when the moment is right. Have faith in the Lord, and trust Him completely."
Just going to a location with the True Creator's idol? That's okay... It would be problematic if I actually had to encounter a god...
Lumian bowed his head humbly and said, "It would be my honor."
Mr. K came up to him, grasped his arm, and transported him into the spirit world via teleportation.
Traversing dense layers of colors and innumerable indescribable transparent beings, the pair arrived at a cathedral.
The cathedral seemed to be located in a deep valley. Its surface was a watery black, decorated with many human bones. The top resembled the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's cathedral, forming a hemispherical shape.
Mr. K silently entered through the open door, his back slightly hunched.
Lumian followed closely behind.
Then, he saw the vast but dimly lit prayer hall and an enormous, pitch-black cross standing in the cathedral's depths.
A naked male idol hung upside down from the cross. Rust-colored iron nails jutted out from various parts of its body, each nail stained with vivid red blood.
Is this the True Creator's idol? Lumian's heart raced as he quickly

averted his gaze.
What he had seen in the Church of The Fool, the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, and the God of Steam and Machinery Church were merely Sacred Emblems. There were no idols. He had assumed Mr. K was referring to the Sacred Emblem as an idol.
Mr. K walked until he was four to five meters from the idol and halted.
Lumian trailed slightly behind and stopped.
As he made his way from the entrance, he got a clear look at the hanging idol's face.
Its nose, mouth, and ears were quite blurry, with only a rough outline. However, its eyes were very distinct and tightly closed, as if enduring all the pain and guilt.
Mr. K drew a cross on his chest and cried out in a raspy voice, "Praise you! Praise you for creating everything! Praise you for shouldering the world's sins!"
Lumian followed suit in offering praise.
Abruptly, his head spun, and his eyes burned with a sense of familiarity.
Wh— Lumian's spiritual intuition alerted him that the negative effects of the Baynfel contract had been triggered. The effect was: In scenes intimately connected to Baynfel's past, he would witness truths better left unknown.
This place is closely tied to Baynfel's past? Was he once a clergyman of the True Creator? Lumian suppressed his curiosity as he continued to focus on the ground.
Suddenly, his eyes froze.
He spotted a blurry, lizard-like creature.
It was the lizard-like elf that had appeared in his dream about Cordu. The same one that had crawled out of Aurore's mouth!
It might have influenced Aurore, stopping her from seeking Hela's help in time!
At the conclusion of the Tree of Shadow incident, the lizard-like elf had also made an appearance.
Why was it present now, in the True Creator's cathedral?
As Mr. K sprawled on the ground, pressing his face firmly against the watery black stone bricks, Lumian instinctively looked up.
He witnessed the huge pitch-black cross transform into an illusory shape, as if it loomed over a mountain range's peak. On the indistinct figure hanging upside down, lizard-like elves crawled in and out, circling and dancing...
Lumian watched the scene in a daze as Mr. K's slightly muffled voice resounded in his ears.
"Oh, merciful Father, I implore your mercy for the transgressions

I've made."
End of Volume—Sinner